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STATEMENT

OF THE

PROCEEDINGS IN THE FIRST CHURCH AND PARISH

IN DEDHAM,

RESPECTING

THE SETTLEMENT OF A MINISTER,

1818.

WITH SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH POLITY.

—•—
BY

A MEMBER OF THE SAID CHURCH AND PARISH,

At the request of a multitude within and without.

—•—

CAMBRIDGE :

PRINTED BY HILLIARD AND METCALF.

1819.
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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

It has been suggested by many, that the publication of an account of the recent transactions in Dedham, respecting the settlement of a minister, with some illustration of the points of church polity, brought in question by them, would promote the cause of religious order. We so far confide in public sentiment, as to believe the suggestion correct. We believe that this picture of *disorder*, if drawn to the life, would so shock and deter the beholder, as to cause him, if he belong to the congregational community, to cling, with increased affection, to the ancient, regular, and pacific principles and usages of the congregational churches. For the honor of the christian name, we would gladly suppress the picture, but for the good of the christian cause, we must not. It is indeed impossible to give to those who have not witnessed the scene, any adequate idea of it, either as it respects the nature of the means, or the extent of the mischiefs. Still we confidently expect that what *can* be made manifest of this bold experiment, with its deplorable results, will excite to a diligent investigation, and watchful guardianship, of those *principles of order*, which have hitherto rendered peaceful and happy this religious community; but which have become too little known and understood. Habituated to the regular enjoyment of their beneficial effects, we have not been sufficiently attentive to the examination of their grounds and reasons, and of course not sufficiently prepared for their defence. This attack will call forth the resources and exertions of every friend of the church; by which means, we doubt not, that what the torpor or timidity of its enemies before allowed it to hold by an uncertain tenure, will now be guarded and secured by the vigilance of its friends. These principles will, on investigation, be found to constitute a system, beautiful, as well for its liberality, as its order; every way adapted to the condition of this community; and remarkably consonant to the practice of the primitive

churches. Should this system, which is settled in the habits of the people, and, as we believe, supported by a fair construction of the laws of the state, be abandoned, no other could be substituted in its place. A new habit cannot be *willed* into existence, and without *such* a basis, nothing permanent is to be expected from the present state of society. Let the pious and discerning seriously ponder, and impartially judge.

That the public should be correctly informed of the course of proceedings, and state of facts in this case, is due also to the large number of respectable men and women, who are thus deprived of their religious privileges, and made wretched, not only without necessity, but without the shadow of justification. How long this state may continue we know not. They are represented as wilful and obstinate, and without reason opposing an "amiable" young man. However incredible this may be in itself, so little of the real truth has been generally diffused, that people are left to give credit to this misrepresentation, or *conjecture* some cause. Did we not believe that we were vindicating the injured and oppressed, and contributing to their relief, and doing service to the community at large, and ultimately adding to the sum of good, we would most cheerfully suffer this obscurity to rest forever on the transactions. Every moment spent in contemplating or describing them, and their desolating effects (which may not have ended when their authors shall have gone to render their account) must be a moment of pain.

In making the exposition, we shall not knowingly exceed, in the smallest particular, the bounds of truth; but to be useful, we must speak plainly. It is impossible that this case should be justly estimated, in all its important bearings, without a full detail of the facts, as well as an ample illustration of the principles, which apply to it. It will be observed that we have nothing to do with the character or conduct of any, excepting in connexion with this business, which is of universal concern to our religious community. It is impossible to comprehend effects, without understanding their causes. No other method than the one we have taken could communicate a just idea of either.

Every one acquainted with this case knows, that an immense evil has been done. Every christian knows, that a wise Providence is continually operating to educe good from evil,—either to those by whom the evil is effected, or to those who are immediately affected by it, or in a more extended sphere. In this moral process, human instruments are used. The first step to the removal or correction of evil is to make it manifest. To all practical purposes, that which does not appear, is as that which does not exist.

We could have wished that the service had fallen into abler hands. But under existing circumstances, being convinced, on the most solemn consideration, that duty requires the course we are now pursuing, we cheerfully resign the result into the hands of HIM, whose “eyes are in every place;” and who, if, for wise ends, he suffer iniquity to triumph and disorder to prevail for a season, in his external church, will ultimately overrule it for the advancement of the *internal*, for the sake of which all things are.

A STATEMENT, &c.

ONE hundred and eighty years ago, the church in Dedham was gathered and established, upon Congregational principles, with much solemnity and *order*. It has enjoyed six *regular* and faithful *Pastors*. They all held substantially the same views of the christian doctrines and precepts, though probably there were shades of difference in their modes of illustrating and enforcing them. Their people have always been accustomed to the solemn and close style of address, which is denominated evangelical preaching, but never to the nice distinctions of scholastic and technical theology. At the time the office became vacant, by the removal of Mr. Bates, perhaps it would have been difficult to find a people, who had partaken less in the party distinctions of the day. It was the general opinion, and the repeated declaration of those, who have been most active in producing the present unhappy state of things, that it would not be difficult to settle a successor, with almost perfect unanimity.

In the proceedings, however, which took place relative to the dissolution of the pastoral relation of Mr. Bates, there was a disposition manifested by two men, which led those, who understood their characters, to predict the course which they have since pursued. They threw every obstacle in the way of the adoption of such measures, as the rules of the congregational communion require. The prudence and firmness of the pastor, with the assistance of the friends of order, finally defeated their purpose, and the dissolution took place under the sanction of a mutual council, called by the *pastor* and the *church*.

Not discouraged by this defeat, they resolved to take into their hands the business of settling a successor. In order to

understand the depth of their plan, and the means which they had in their power, and intended to use, and did use, for the accomplishment of their purpose, it is proper to state, that these men had been for several years the chief plotters and workers of the two political parties in the place, and thus had in their controul, and were familiar with the use of, the whole complex machinery for operating on the prejudices and passions of the people. Political disputes having become less interesting of late, and being of one heart on the subject of religious order, they joined their hands to bring about such a state of things in that respect, as was suited to their taste,—“peaceably if they could, forcibly if they must.”

At a parish meeting on the 19th of January 1818, it was agreed that the contract with Mr. Bates should cease on the 20th of February following. At that meeting, these men procured themselves, or one of them procured himself and the other, to be appointed on the committee for supplying the pulpit, under the following vote, proposed by one of them, viz. “Voted, that the pulpit be supplied by a committee of five to be chosen by the parish, *and that no person be permitted to preach in the pulpit after the 20th of February next, except persons employed by said committee.*” As this committee was chosen on nomination, one person happened to be associated with them, not suited to serve their views. The annual parish meeting occurred on the third Monday in March, when the procedure was corrected, a new choice being made, by *ballot*, at the motion of their friends, who appeared to act in concert, although there was no concert in opposition to them. Thus prepared, they proceeded to their work. And we do not believe that another instance can ever occur in the Commonwealth, where men thus situated, having as much ability, industry and perseverance, so regardless of means and consequences, shall unite together for such an object.

It happened that the first candidate they employed was the very one for their purpose. We would gladly omit this figure from the picture. But he has so intermingled, and is so blended with the principal group, that it is impossible. Let not what we shall say of him be imputed to any want of res-

pect to the sacred office with which he *appears* to the public eye to be invested. It arises from a contrary sentiment, a desire that that office should ever be sustained according to the laws of order and purity, and also from the necessity of the case, that the public may have a full understanding of the subject. It would be a sad reflection indeed, if the sacerdotal gown, by whatever means obtained, must be considered an impenetrable veil to hide *those means* from public scrutiny. We believe we can make it appear, that according to principle, he is no more a clergyman now, than he was the first day he was employed as a candidate. Mr. Lamson came to this place, well recommended as a scholar, and a man of fair external character. But have not subsequent events shown that his character had never been tried? He has not been permitted to fall into this temptation, and to *fall* in it, without some wise design in Him, without whom a sparrow falls not. Immense and irreparable as are the evils and miseries, which he has been the *instrument* of inflicting on others, we believe we express the universal sentiment, when we say, that we have no other desire concerning him, than that this trial of his virtue may prove a purifying process, out of which he shall come, prepared for the full enjoyment of the felicity of doing good.

His first engagement for four sabbaths, expiring about the time of the March parish meeting, a second was entered into. Before the end of this, the committee had probably ascertained that he would be a fit instrument for their purposes; but the people manifested so much dissatisfaction, that they thought it politic to employ two other candidates, for four weeks each, not desiring that they should be acceptable, as we have reason to believe from the manner in which they spoke of them, as soon as they came, or before, as well as from other circumstances.—At the expiration of these sixteen weeks the people were not prepared to choose a minister. But we believe, if they had then been obliged to elect one of the three, and had been left to act without influence, Mr. Lamson would have had fewer votes than either of the others. His exercises had exhibited so little of those peculiar quali-

ties which go to constitute pulpit talents, so little of spirituality and knowledge of the scriptures, so little of that which fixes the attention and reaches the heart, that he had excited no considerable interest, and but for the committee would have been passed by unregretted. They, however, chose to pass by all others, and bring *him* back.

He now took up his residence in the parish, which none of the candidates had hitherto done. And now the electioneering process went into operation in earnest. The members of the committee visited and revisited every house, and shop, and place, where there was any electioneering work to be done. Was there a prejudice, a passion, or an interest, which could be wrought upon and turned to favour their cause, it was addressed and re-addressed, in every shape and form, which ingenuity could devise. If in some cases an influence was to be produced by depreciating misrepresentations of our late minister, that method was not neglected. In others, the name of this or that individual, who might be disliked by some, and who was not satisfied with the candidate, was used as the medium of prejudice. In others, bold assertions, suited to the occasion, were made to answer the purpose. In all, the powers of persuasion were used, the whole host of one-sided considerations, which a fertile mind could advance, were urged, and pressed, and repeated.

The candidate was next associated with the committee-men, and taken from house to house, to display his personal attractions and talents at pleasing; yielding himself entirely into their hands to do with as they desired—saying to them, by implication, gentlemen, use me to accomplish your views—get me this parish if you can—you know the means better than I do—I am your instrument—do with me as you think best—take me when and where you please. And the whole manner and circumstances spoke to those he thus visited language in perfect accordance with such an object. The business was something entirely distinct from that pleasant and suitable intercourse, founded on voluntary invitation and the offices of civility, which usually takes place between a candidate and people. It was pursued and continued, till it

became both disgusting and ridiculous, and that not merely to those who were dissatisfied with Mr. Lamson's preaching. It was a frequent remark, there never was any thing like this before. If the young man had the smallest share of delicacy, he could not submit to it. This eagerness to obtain the parish, proves him unfit for it. This yielding himself to the management of others, shows him destitute of that self-respect which is essential to the station he aims at. This course of conduct develops traits of character which appear to us to disqualify him for the sacred office, and however well we might like him as a preacher, we could not consent to receive him for our minister. Has, or has not, his subsequent conduct proved that they were not mistaken, in their estimate of his character?—Several, whom he visited in this way, thought that *religion* would be a proper topic of conversation, with one who offered himself for their spiritual guide; but when they introduced and wished to pursue it, he showed a disposition to evade and avoid it. These were not wild enthusiasts, but sober rational men. They could get no satisfaction as to the state of his mind.

The execution of the foregoing process consumed about three weeks, during which, some things came to the ears of the committee, which either led them to doubt their standing and hesitate to proceed on their own responsibility, or so operated in some other way as to induce them to call a parish meeting, "to see if the parish would instruct them in what manner to supply the pulpit, or dismiss them from office." The meeting was held on the 13th of July. This was to be a farce, which the committee, while they appeared to ask others to tell them what to do, were to act wholly themselves; partly before the audience, and partly behind the scene. As soon as the meeting was opened, the chairman of the committee made a speech containing such statements and reasonings as he thought suited to his purpose. The moment he had done, up starts one of his friends to read the following motion, which had been prepared before the meeting, and put into his hands, viz. "Voted, that the committee chosen to supply the pulpit be directed to employ Mr. Alvan Lamson

as a candidate for eight sabbaths, and that Mr. Lamson have liberty during this to make such exchanges as he shall judge expedient." While he was yet reading, another, in his zeal to perform the part assigned him, starts up even to the top of the seat, and seconds the motion.—The motion was opposed by several of the most respectable and substantial inhabitants, on the ground, that they were desirous to hear some other candidate, which they earnestly requested they might be indulged in. But not the smallest disposition was shown to accommodate them. It was then opposed on the ground, that the committee were chosen to act their own judgment, and were to proceed upon that, until the parish should elect for settlement some candidate they had employed, or dismiss them from office, or until they chose to resign. It was remarked that when chosen, they had informed the parish that they wished for no instructions, but should be willing to hear suggestions from individuals, and now, as soon as individuals speak to them, they call a meeting for instructions; that they seemed to have mistaken the object of their appointment, and to have supposed that it was to settle a minister, instead of being merely to supply the pulpit with preaching; that whenever the people became sufficiently interested in any candidate to desire his settlement, they would take care to have a meeting called, without being driven up to it by the committee; that until then, it was their business to hire candidates; and that as a committee they had nothing to do with calling parish meetings, unless it was for the purpose of resigning their employment, which had not been urged upon them, and which they had shown no reluctance at accepting. The introduction of electioneering tricks into a business of this kind, where of all others the mind should be left in perfect freedom, was deeply lamented and earnestly deprecated. The indelicacy of the candidate in yielding himself up to their disposal, as he had done, was hinted at, and strong representations were made of the gross and disgusting nature of their proceedings.* It was requested and urged that no vote might

* These remarks proceeded from a constitutional detestation of every thing like management, intrigue, and deceit, under any circumstances,

be taken at that meeting, which would draw a line of division; for that being once done, it would be more difficult to unite in future—but all to no purpose.

When the question was taken on the motion for instructing, there were about 90 votes, two thirds for, and one third against the measure, the committee all voting to instruct themselves. Mr. Lamson immediately engaged for a further time, instead of withdrawing himself, as a man of correct feelings would have done, when he saw the state of the parish. But he had entered into an “entangling alliance,” from which he was not allowed to escape. He and the committee had now two months before them to finish their work, which they went on to accomplish, though in a more retired and silent way than before. He confined his intercourse to his particular friends, and endeavoured to accommodate his preaching so as to supply the defects which had been complained of—but in vain—and for a reason which will be obvious to those who know the distinction between *science* and *wisdom*. The committee were busy wherever there was occasion for it.

It was apprehended, which no doubt was the fact, that he was as much as possible kept in ignorance of the real state of things, and was treated with an abundance of misrepresentations. Measures were therefore taken to give him correct information, which, however, he seemed inclined to avoid, or to receive with indifference, and to which he probably paid little regard, as it did not agree with the accounts he was daily receiving, from sources more in his confidence. He has since found it to be correct, and will find it more and more confirmed every month he remains here.

The committee now doubting whether they should get a vote in the church, were diligent in preparing the minds of the people for the course they had always intended to take, if necessary—and whether necessary or not, if they could bring public feeling to submit to it. It was in every body’s mouth, that Mr. ——— says, and Mr. ——— says, the

and *indignation and horror* at seeing them introduced into this sacred business. Whether it were *politic* or not to make them, is a consideration for those who can compromise such sensations.

church has nothing to do with settling a minister. That is an old fashioned notion which is done away. The power is all in the parish. There is no need of taking any vote in the church about it. The constitution has done so and so, and judge Parsons has determined so and so. Still, doubting whether public sentiment would permit them to proceed without having a church meeting, they took every measure, and some very extraordinary ones, to secure a majority there. Among other things, they kept one member away by threatening to prosecute him for a particular immorality of which he was supposed to be guilty several years ago. Whether his opposition to the settlement of Mr. Lamson arose from a good or bad motive was immaterial as to the effect of his vote. And this it seems natural to conclude was all they regarded, for they took no pains to purge that part of the church which was in their favor, although there are more than one who live in open immoralities.

When all these preparations had been made, and every other within the compass of the means we have before alluded to, a parish meeting was called, to be held on the 31st of August, "to see if the parish will elect Mr. Alvan Lamson as their public protestant teacher of piety, religion and morality, and invite him to settle in the work of the gospel ministry in said parish." Seven days after the parish meeting was notified, notice was given to the brethren of the church to meet also on the 31st, "to see if they would elect a *Pastor*." In the church meeting, considerable discussion was had, in which, those not satisfied with Mr. Lamson, expostulated with his friends on the hardship of having him forced upon them in this precipitate manner, without giving an opportunity to see whether we might not be better united. It was stated that beside the male members of the church who were dissatisfied, there was a very large number of females, who could not be represented there, but who were equally interested in the subject and equally entitled to our regard, and three fourths of whom it was believed were strongly opposed to Mr. Lamson's settlement. His friends were asked to consider how small and transient a sacrifice it would be to give up

one they had but a transient acquaintance with, compared with the distressing evil of having one permanently placed over the church, in the interesting relation of pastor, with whom two thirds at least were not only not satisfied, but to whom they had a positive dislike—and that if they made the sacrifice, beside the enjoyment they would immediately find in the benevolent deed, they would probably be soon compensated by having one sent them, whom they would like as well, or better, than the one they had parted with.—By way of answer to these things, we were treated with a dry law speech, and with the information, that it was only out of courtesy and respect to some of the elder members, that a church meeting had been called; that the vote there was of no consequence; but that the whole business was in the hands of the parish. This, it will be perceived, was to prepare the minds of their adherents for the result, let it be which way it might.—The question on which the vote was taken was, “are the church now ready to elect a Pastor?” Notwithstanding one member who was against Mr. Lamson, had been kept away by threats, and another brought out to vote for him, who from age and decrepitude had been a long time nearly confined to his bed; who had heard him but once, and probably will never hear him again; and who did not pretend to act on his own judgment; the vote, on dividing the house, was found to be, 15 in the affirmative, and 17 in the negative. Soon after the vote was declared, an old gentleman, who hears with difficulty, stated, that he misunderstood the moderator, and meant to have voted in the negative; and in the parish meeting, which was held immediately after, on being particularly questioned by the moderator, he declared himself against Mr. Lamson, and voted accordingly, and has so voted in all the meetings since. This would have made the division 14 to 18, two of the three deacons voting in the negative.* This may be the proper place to inform the rea-

* There were at that time residing in the parish thirty eight male members of the church, consequently six were absent from the meeting. One was kept away as above stated. Two were old and infirm, and had

der, that every man of the aforesaid committee was a member of the church.

It having now been made manifest that the church did not desire Mr. Lamson for their pastor, it became proper, according to every principle applicable to the subject, whether of religion, reason, custom, law, peace, order, or good neighbourhood, that all further proceedings respecting his settlement should cease. Most unhappily for us and for him, this was not allowed to be the case. The parish meeting was immediately opened, and as soon as it was organized, a motion was made "to choose Mr. Lamson according to the article in the warrant," which passed 81 to 44. Among the 81 were some members of the episcopal church, who had been induced to vote by the committee, to swell the numbers, and some who had transferred three or four days before, and had not had much opportunity to become acquainted with the qualifications of the candidate. After voting the salary &c. in which was included the *church's* house,* the meeting was adjourned to the 28th of September, to give Mr. Lamson time to prepare his answer.

Mr. Lamson immediately left the place, and did not return to reside or preach, till after his settlement. It was not generally expected that he would ever have returned. Some of the most respectable of those who voted for him were not desirous that he should. While absent from the evil influences which had ensnared him here, and where he could obtain the opinion of impartial men, he had made up his mind to answer in the negative. He had prepared such an answer and

heard Mr. Lamson but once or twice, and declared themselves not qualified to act on the subject, and that they should not act in any way whatever. *One* was said to be unwell on the day, who is also aged and is not known to have expressed any opinion, and probably had none. *One* is a man something odd in his humor, who never attends meetings of any kind, excepting on the Sabbath, but had repeatedly said "he did not think Mr. Lamson equal to the task." *One* has absented himself from the communion table several years on account of being reprov'd for open immoralities.

* The house, glebe and funds are vested exclusively in the church, and are under their controul, and always have been.

delivered it to the clergyman who was to preach here, the day preceding the adjourned parish meeting. And how could any man in his *right mind* think of answering otherwise? But why was not *that* answer given? The committee had probably learned in some way (how we are not informed) what the answer was to be. The chairman went to Cambridge, the day before it was given. When he met Mr. Lamson, according to his own statement, Mr. Lamson says, "I am sorry to see you." Why sorry to see him? Did he not consider him his best friend, one with whom he had taken sweet counsel? Why sorry to see him? Had he given pledges of fidelity, which in his absence he had dared to forfeit, but which in his presence he felt bound to redeem? If, as he tells us in his answer, he "had maturely considered the subject, asking counsel of others and seeking divine direction and aid," and under *such* influences had settled his mind in the *negative*, why was he sorry to see him? Was he fearful that *his* influence would overcome all others, human and divine, and induce him to act contrary to the deliberate convictions of his own mind?—It seems his fears were but too well grounded!!—The words just quoted were no doubt written in the introductory part of his *negative answer*, and in that connexion, we would hope, were the honest effusions of his heart; but to transfer them to his *affirmative answer*, which was thus precipitately produced, and under *such* an influence—we leave it to the reader to apply such epithets as he thinks the case to require.

But in a philosophical point of view, one is curious to inquire, what motives could have been presented to his mind in this interview? It can hardly be imagined that he was in a situation to elicit any of a religious nature—no new prospect of personal comfort could be held out—there was no authority to offer any further pecuniary inducement—the opposition had in no degree diminished. What then could the language be? Can any other be conceived, by those who know the case, than something of this kind? If you leave us, our cause is lost. Never can we embody our phalanx again. If we fail in this attempt at revolution, we fail forever. We have exhausted all our means. We have put forth our whole

strength. We have exposed ourselves at every point. A powerful reaction will commence. We shall lose all influence. The glorious cause in which we have laboured, and in which you have been our associate and instrument, is gone. You must not forsake us. You have pledged yourself. We insist on the fulfilment of your engagement. We demand it.—The result is a complete re-surrender of himself into those toils, which he had made an effort to break! And if any after struggles have been made, as we are informed there have been, they were of course weaker, and served more to confirm the bondage. He is now slave for life—we should have said, “so long as he carries on the work of the ministry in this place.” No act is to be expected which is not dictated or approved by these men. They tolerate nothing which they cannot control. Every thing else they doom to destruction. And when the excitement of the day is a little past, if we do not mightily mistake, the most profound contempt will succeed to the present apparent attachment, which, we are greatly fearful, is in fact nothing but the basest self-love.

The affirmative answer was matter of universal astonishment. Even several of those who finally assisted to carry him through, and were members of the parish council,* are known to have expressed their surprise when they heard of it. In the parish, it produced a sensation of wretchedness, which nothing served to alleviate but a firm belief that it would be impossible to get him settled under the circumstances of the case. In the parish meeting which was held the day after the answer was given, it was thought expedient to propose a measure which would give him an opening to retract. Accordingly the following motion was introduced, and the grounds of it explained and enforced by the mover and others, viz. “Whereas it is doubtful whether this parish have legal power† to perform the terms of their offer to

* When speaking of this body of men, we shall use the term *Council*, to save circumlocution, but not being constituted upon ecclesiastical principles, as we shall show fully when we come to treat of their proceedings, we do not admit that they had any ecclesiastical jurisdiction. Let the same be noted as to the word *Ordination*.

† See note, page 16.

Mr. A. Lamson, made on the 31st day of August last, in order to induce him to settle in the work of the ministry—and whereas he has accepted the said offer in full faith on the performance of said terms—and whereas it is to be apprehended that many other circumstances relating to the situation of the parish and the members thereof are not known to Mr. Lamson—Therefore in order to preserve the good faith and harmony of the parish, and to prevent misunderstanding and difficulty hereafter, *Moved*, that Mr. Lamson be requested to reconsider the question of his acceptance of the said offer.” The motion was opposed with great vehemence by the committee, who told us, among other things, that if they could not hold the funds, they could tax the opposition, and we should see who was the longest winded, or words to that effect. When it was insisted that they could not get their candidate regularly ordained without the concurrence of the church, they quoted the gentleman, who was afterwards moderator of their council, as one who paid no regard to church doings on such occasions, and intimated that the idea was becoming common among the clergy.—In the vote on the motion, 43 were for it, and 65 against it.—Two or three of the most respectable relented, but those who were determined to proceed at all hazards, immediately passed the following vote, viz. “Voted to choose a committee to agree with Mr. Lamson upon the time of his ordination, and upon a council to assist at the same, and to issue letters missive, and to lay before said council when convened the proceedings of the parish, and to represent the parish before them.” It was requested that the council might be appointed in public meeting, as is usual, but refused. Every thing must be done in conclave. No opportunity must be lost for intrigue, especially so important a one as this. The people must not know who the council are to be, nor even the day for ordination, till the managers shall choose to inform them. The same committee are appointed in the lump who have directed every thing from the beginning, with the addition of four of their coadjutors. Indeed it could not be expected that any others would serve with them on such an occasion.

Mr. Lamson came to Dedham the day, or day but one, after, when he was served with a copy of the doings of the meeting. Some of his friends, not of the committee, inquired of some of the opposition, why they had not taken more pains to inform him of the situation of things in the parish? It was replied, that pains had been taken before his election; that since, he had kept himself away; that the duty did not belong exclusively to them; and that it was not conceived possible that he could accept: But that further representations should now be made to him. Accordingly, one of the Deacons called on him, and made a full development of what he considered the state of the church and parish, and what he apprehended would be the effect, if he settled. The statements were received with apparent indifference. He had now got again on enchanted ground. The reply in substance was, "you give me no new information, I have considered all these things, and have taken advice."

The committee and the candidate held consultations respecting a council, appointed the ordination for the 28th of October, and adjourned for a fortnight, to find out what churches it would be *suivable* to send to. During this time they were busily employed, and finally packed a council, taken from five different counties, the most distant members living between 60 and 70 miles apart.—To preserve the chronological order, we here insert the letter missive, although it came not to our sight till near twenty days after the council met. It is a document of such curious character that it ought never to perish. It is in these words. "Dedham, October 14, 1818. The religious Congregational Society in the First Parish in Dedham, to the Church of Christ in — under the Pastoral care of the Reverend —. *Brethren*, The Inhabitants of the First Parish in Dedham, in legal Parish Meeting assembled, have elected Mr. *Alvan Lamson* their public Protestant teacher* of Piety, Religion and Morality, and have invited him to settle in the work of the Gospel Ministry with them. *Mr. Lamson* has accepted the invitation. The sub-

* Amidst a multitude of CAPITALS, behold what a small figure the word *teacher* cuts. Are the gentlemen ashamed of the title of their officer?

scribers chosen by said Parish for that purpose, therefore request you, by your Pastor and Delegate, to assist in the ordination of Mr. Lamson, as a Gospel Minister over the Church and Society constituting said Parish. The time appointed for the Ordination is Wednesday the twenty eighth day of October current. The Council are requested to meet at the house of Gragg and Alden adjoining the Court-House in Dedham, at nine o'clock in the forenoon of said day.—We are very respectfully, your Brethren in Christ.”

Signed by 6 members of the } “Committee on be-
church, and 3 who are not. } half of said Parish.”

The council being fixed, the next business was to make an effort to appear before them, in a better garb, than the records of the votes would exhibit. But how was this to be done? If a paper had been prepared for the signature of all who were in favor of the ordination, it was known that several who had voted for Mr. Lamson would not have signed it, in the existing state of things. The expedient therefore hit upon was, to reckon all them in his favor, and to draw up a paper, and carry it round to those who had not voted at the meetings, representing that the signing of it would only express that they had nothing in particular against Mr. Lamson. This is according to the statement of several who signed. All the usual means of getting names to papers, concerning which the parties have no very decided opinion or strong interest, were practised—persuading, importuning, teasing, coaxing, deceiving, any thing, for as we intimated before, the quality of the means has been awfully disregarded through this business. One anecdote which has come to light respecting this paper would illustrate this point a little, if we had time to relate it at large. We would only inquire, on what ground are we to account for the consternation produced by the information that a copy of the paper had been taken by one who had not signed it? Whence the exclamation on this occasion—“it is all over now!” Whence the extreme anxiety to get the copy away, and to prevent its being seen by any of the opposition? What does this mean, and what does it prove? We have our

own conjectures and leave the reader to his. It is certain that several who signed the paper gave a very different account of it, from what it appeared as read before the council, and others could give no account at all. When too, it is known, that there were on the paper the names of some who had never heard Mr. Lamson preach, of others who had heard him but once, of others belonging to the episcopal church, and of one in the *disguised* hand writing of one of the committee, what inference can be drawn, which is reconcilable with fair and correct conduct? If the object had been to give to the council true information of the state of the parish, would such have been the course? From the nature of the case, it is not supposable that we can know a hundredth part of the tricks practised, but every thing we do know, goes to justify and confirm the opinions we have expressed.

Among the signers, they got the names of five of the church, who had not voted. It was immediately sounded far and wide, in town and out, that they had got a majority of the church in favor of Mr. Lamson. Three of these at least, upon hearing it, declared that they meant no such thing. They stated as the only reason of their signing, that they were urged to it on the ground that it had been, or would be, represented that they were opposed to him, and that this paper was only to signify that they had nothing in particular against him. They further said, that it was still their meaning not to be considered as acting either way: And one of them, on finding what use was made of his name, called for the paper, and wrote to that effect against it.—In addition to this paper, a strong effort was now made to get a majority in the church, by representing to some, that Mr. Lamson believed in the divinity of the Saviour, and the necessity of regeneration, which representations, those who had been acquainted with him, before he came here, were astonished to hear of, and those who made them knew to be incorrect, according to the common understanding of those expressions. They had some mental evasion. They were not believed.—Here would be the place to introduce another figure into the picture, one not belonging to the parish and belonging to the parish and intending not to belong to the parish—the figure

of busy neutrality and one-sided impartiality, who, as the business has proceeded, has become more and more officious, inconsistent and disorderly. But we forbear. We shall have occasion for more spare room than remains to us.

After the before mentioned paper had gone round, and picked up every thing that could be had, the opposition prepared one, containing a request that Mr. Lamson might not be ordained, which was intended to show the council the names of the opposition, and was subscribed by 57, and would have been by a number more, if the other paper had not preceded, and a promise been extorted from some who refused to sign that, that they would sign no paper, and if some had not been absent from home when called on to sign. But were not 57 such names as were on it, enough? To bring the state of the *church* fairly to a test, those opposed to Mr. Lamson called a church meeting, to be held two days before the day set for the ordination, for the purpose of voting a protest against his being ordained over the church. A hard struggle was made on the occasion by the committee to get out some of those who had not acted, and a most unworthy attempt to keep one away who had; but all in vain. At the meeting, the following vote was passed, 18 voting in favor of it, viz. "Whereas every christian church has from its divine Head the right to elect its own Pastors, which right it can neither abandon, nor be deprived of; and whereas this church has made no choice of a Pastor since the office became vacant by the removal of the Rev. Mr. Bates; yet it is understood that sundry churches have been invited to send their ministers and delegates for the purpose of placing a Pastor over this church without and against its consent: Therefore *Voted*, that a committee of three members be chosen to represent the church on the occasion, and protest against the intended proceeding."

We have now arrived at the time appointed for what was to pass by the name of an ordination. What churches were represented in council, and by whom, and how the council was organized, will appear, when we come to insert their result. After the votes of the Parish respecting their invita-

tion to Mr. Lamson were presented and read, the committee appointed to represent the church produced copies of the church votes, and in behalf of the church read the following Protest or Remonstrance.

The first Church of Christ in Dedham to the Gentlemen convened for the supposed purpose of ordaining Mr. Alvan Lamson, as Pastor of the said Church.

Christian Brethren and Friends,

Instead of being allowed to indulge the pleasing sensations and joyful hopes usual on occasions like this, we are driven to the unwelcome office of remonstrating and protesting. This we do, not from any want of respect to those before whom we appear, nor from an unwillingness to enter again into the interesting relation of a flock to its pastor. Nothing would rejoice our hearts more, than to receive again into this fold a *good shepherd*, who should enter in by the *door*.—We know not the voice of strangers.

It has been made known to you, that this church has not elected Mr. Lamson for its pastor. It is equally well known, and follows of course, that it has not invited a council for the purpose of ordaining him. In this unusual situation, and amidst the multitude of considerations which present themselves to the mind, it is somewhat difficult to select with precision the course, in which we shall best acquit ourselves of the high responsibility under which we act. Of this however we have no doubt, that it is our indispensable duty to enter our solemn *protest*, against the ordination of Mr. Lamson, as pastor of this church, and to give the reasons on which it is founded, if any further reason can be necessary than what has already been mentioned.—We take the fact of your being assembled, and being engaged as you now are, as an indication that a further development is expected. We shall therefore proceed to make it, we hope with that candor and fairness, with which we are not permitted to doubt it will be received.

We consider ourselves as addressing those who have come together with different feelings from such as usually attend a

secular engagement, and that all your deliberations will have reference to the Head of the church, the laws of his kingdom, and the permanent good of its members. We deem it therefore proper to say, in the first place, that we cannot acquit ourselves to Him, unless we strive to stand fast in the liberty wherewith he has made us free. It is not in our power to abandon the rights which he has conferred, or neglect the correlative duties which they imply. They are so interwoven in his administrations, that they cannot be disregarded without violating the laws of his divine order. Among these, stand preeminent *the right and duty of a Christian Church to elect its own pastor*. This right has existed from the days of the Apostles, to the present time, and its exercise has never been interrupted, but by clerical or civil usurpation. It has been asserted in different ages of the church, at the expense of all the earthly goods which men hold dear. It surely cannot fall to the lot of the descendants of New England's pilgrims, the inheritors of congregational liberty, to be the first who voluntarily relinquish it.

It may perhaps be inquired, as we understand some have affected to doubt, what constitutes a christian church? The different senses in which the word *church* is used, according to the subject matter treated of, are familiar to those whom we address. The principal are, the invisible church, the general visible church, and a particular visible church, being a branch of the general. It is the last of these about which we inquire. In a book ascribed to Lord Chancellor King, entitled "An inquiry into the constitution, discipline, unity, and worship of the primitive church," a particular church is defined to mean and consist of "a company of believers, who at one time, in one place, associate themselves together, and concur in the participation of all the ordinances and institutions of Jesus Christ, with their proper pastors and ministers." It is proper to say of this book, which is probably in few hands, that the high standing of its author, the manifest impartiality with which it is written, and the authenticity of its references, entitle it to no ordinary degree of credit; and that it contains an able defence of congregational principles, drawn from the

eminent writers of primitive times. The above definition, which is the same in substance with the one used in our Platform, describes the most usual and common acceptation of the word. Such were the church of Antioch, the church of Smyrna, the church of Corinth, &c. and such are the congregational churches in this state. He further says, that those who composed a particular church were called *the brethren, the faithful*, &c. and had the appointment of their church officers of every grade. When he speaks of the members of the church, in contradistinction from its officers, he sometimes uses the word *people, congregation, parish*; but always in such connexion as to show, that the same body of men is intended as is described in the foregoing definition, that is, those who have associated together as there mentioned. There is this general remark to be made respecting most of the books which have been written in defence of the rights of churches, that their principal object has been to defend against prelatic or monarchic encroachment: Hence they so frequently make use of the word *people*, &c. in opposition to *priest*, &c. when they mean the *church*, according to the definition just given, as is evident from the connexion. The danger of encroachment is always from the source where power resides, whether monarchic, prelatic, aristocratic, or democratic. Those whom we address are too discerning not to perceive the obvious inference. Some, without attending to these considerations, have inferred that there were in the primitive times religious societies, such as we have at this day, consisting of professors and non-professors, who exercised the power of choosing church officers; not considering, that during the three first centuries of the christian era, and until that religion was patronized by the civil power, none could have the appellation of christians, but those who turned from paganism and openly and individually professed their faith; and thus, after passing through the instruction and trial of catechumens, were admitted into particular churches, before which they had no voice in the elections. Nor could the decree of an emperor convert his subjects into christians. Its only effect was, to put a stop to persecution, leaving the religion to make its way to the hearts

of individuals as before, which was manifested only by their joining themselves to some church. The struggle between paganism and christianity was long, and in the mean time the church was divided into a variety of sects and parties, all which tended by no means to diminish the necessity of a formal covenanting among bodies of individuals, in order to the enjoyment of religious ordinances. At length, the popish usurpation swallowed up all distinctions, and put an end to the power of the people in any shape.

An important object of the reformation was to restore to churches the power of electing their pastors. This was effected in a considerable portion of the reformed churches; but in others, where there is a connexion with the civil power, the right of presentation is a matter of property, and the members have nothing to do but receive the man placed over them, and pay their tithes. To this hardship our ancestors did not choose to submit. To avoid it, they left their native country and came to this. Being free from this yoke of bondage, they did not consider themselves “without law to God, but under the law to Christ.” Having the power to arrange their own social regulations, and entertaining the just idea that the process of order is from things spiritual to things natural, they immediately set themselves to establish such religious institutions, as they thought conformable to the Word of God, for the basis of their civil organization. It is to this correct principle, which has been preserved in some degree through all the modifications of our system, that we owe what remains to us of moral order in the community. Among the earliest of their statutes which have been preserved to us, we find an act in the nature of a declaration of the rights of churches, which makes some regulations as to the mode of gathering them, and among other things declares, “Every church hath free liberty of election and ordination of all her officers from time to time.” In the management of their civil concerns, they did not consider any as suitable to be intrusted with the disposal of the rights of their fellow-men, who were not willing to submit to the regulations of the gospel. They were reluctant to admit, that there could be

any difference between the good man and the good citizen. While they were few in number, and continued to be animated with the spirit which brought them over, they were able in a good degree to maintain the manners of the primitive christians. But as their members increased, the bond of union became less perfect. It was many years however before they admitted any to have a share in the affairs of their commonwealth, who were not christian professors. Whether that regulation continued too long, or not long enough, is not for us to say. They had a right to have it as they chose. In 1665, some modification took place as to the civil powers of the inhabitants, but still under close restrictions, as to certificates of character, &c. In 1668, an act, explanatory of the beforementioned declaratory one, was passed, in which it is "enacted and declared, that by the church, is meant, such as are in full communion only." All others are prohibited from voting in the election of ministers. The Platform, which had been agreed on by a General Synod at Cambridge, in 1648, and which embodies our church system, was again sanctioned by a General Synod of the churches, at Boston, in 1679, and in 1680, was approved by the General Court, and "ordered to be printed for the benefit of the churches in present and after times." This was fifteen years after others, besides church members, voted in civil affairs. It does not appear that any others voted, respecting the settlement of ministers, till after the Provincial Charter, in 1691. About this time, as the writings of those days, as well as the statute book, evince, the same question which we have now under consideration, was agitated, and underwent much discussion. It is one of those, which Dr. Increase Mather, President of Harvard College, considers, in his book, entitled, "The Order of the Gospel professed and practised by the Churches of Christ in New-England." Dr. Cotton Mather reexamines it, in his "Ratio Disciplinae Fratrum Novanglorum." Both these learned Doctors of our ecclesiastical law, who have been considered of high authority in the church, support with the soundest arguments, and most unquestionable references, the *right* for which we contend. But it will be expected that we pursue its

legal history, by which it will be perceived, that the statute provisions fluctuated a little, about this time, but shortly settled into permanent tranquillity.—[See note A, at the end.]

In 1692, the General Court passed an act entitled “An Act for the settlement and support of ministers and schoolmasters,” in which it is enacted, “that the inhabitants of each town shall take due care to be constantly provided with an able, learned, orthodox minister or ministers of good conversation to dispense the word of God unto them, which minister or ministers shall be supported by the town.” And in the same act it is declared, “that every minister being a person of good conversation, able, learned, and orthodox, that shall be chosen by the major part of the inhabitants in any town, at a town meeting duly warned for that purpose, shall be the minister of such town, and the whole town shall be obliged to pay towards his maintenance and settlement.” This is the only clause in any act that ever appears to have passed in the Colony, Province, or Commonwealth, which looks like giving to a civil body the uncontrouled power of appointing *ministers*.—And this clause, the very next year, is “repealed and utterly made void forever,” with unusual marks of disapprobation, and instead thereof, the mode of appointment is established, which has been in uninterrupted use, a century and a quarter, from that day to the present. The provision is in these words, “that each respective gathered church in any town or place within this Province, that at any time shall be in want of a minister, such church shall have power, according to the directions given in the word of God, to choose their own minister; and the major part of such inhabitants as do there usually attend on the public worship of God, and are by law duly qualified for voting in town affairs, concurring with the church’s act, the person thus elected and approved, accepting thereof, settling with them, shall be the minister, towards whose settlement and maintenance all the inhabitants of the town &c. shall contribute: Provided nothing herein contained shall abridge the inhabitants of Boston of their accustomed way and practice as to the choice and maintenance of their ministers.”—It appears that something of party spirit

remained for some time, and it probably manifested itself in unwarrantable measures, for, two years after this, viz. in 1695, there was an additional act passed, which provides, that when a church shall choose a minister, and present their choice to the town or precinct for concurrence, and they shall deny their approbation, the church may call a council of 3 or 5 neighboring churches to hear and consider the exceptions against the church's election, and if they notwithstanding approve the choice, the minister may be settled, and the town must support him; but if otherwise, the church shall proceed to choose another. Great pains have been taken to represent this, as a very odious and oppressive provision. It is one which we should by no means wish to see revived, for it manifestly leads to contention—but it is far less odious and oppressive, both in its principle and its operation, than the measure now contended for, as we shall show before we conclude. How far it was ever acted upon we know not. It probably went to sleep by common consent many years before the revolution. Thus the controversy ended, and the people have proceeded peaceably and happily from that day to this.

In framing the State Constitution, the friends of order had a different task to perform. The public mind was under the agitation of the revolutionary contest, and filled with all sorts of alarms, real and imaginary, on the subject of government. Every thing that was one step beyond an unrestrained state of nature, seemed an approach toward oppression. The people's veneration for the institutions of their ancestors had become in some measure blunted and obscured by their long controversy with the mother country about civil rights. A five years' war had loosened the foundations of their religious habits, and the whole fabric of moral order and social regulation, which had been the unseen cause of their previous happiness, seemed in danger of being swept away. The more discerning thought it all important to attempt to save something from the ruin, to place here and there a prop, which might possibly preserve it from going to utter destruction. It is to this state of things that we are to ascribe the very pe-

culiar manner in which the articles in the bill of rights, relating to the subject under consideration, are expressed. The object to be secured was, *the support of public worship*. No complaints existed, in regard to the manner in which it had been supported for a long period before. But the people's heads were full of terrors about monarchies and hierarchies, and all their appendages. Hence the provision that religious societies should at all times have the right to choose their own *teachers*; that is, that they should not have them imposed by any other authority, civil or ecclesiastic, leaving the mode and form of election wholly undesignated, to be regulated by the existing statutes and established custom, in all respects not inconsistent with the general principles of liberty. It is easy to show that the present custom is perfectly consistent with those principles, and that the proposed innovation would insupportably violate them. But to bring the new doctrine to a fair test, let us suppose the following words to have been added to the clause just mentioned, "and the churches shall have no right to choose their pastors," or "churches shall have no agency in the settlement of ministers." Does not every one believe that the people would have been struck with astonishment, and have rejected the article?—It is not to be supposed for a moment, that those wise and good men, who were so carefully endeavouring to guard the rights of all, and at the same time to establish christian worship, should at the very instant become persecutors of the christian church, in the congregational form—that child of liberty, and of the prayers, tears, labors, and sufferings of their pious progenitors. But this would be the result of the doctrine now contended for, that of *imposing a pastor over a church against its consent*. If any other man, or body, or description or organization of men, has a right to do this, the church is no longer free, liberty of conscience is at an end. If one kind of man may be put over them, another may—one to whom they have no attachment, but an aversion, one whom they believe destitute of religious principle, one whose views and feelings are diverse from theirs, or concerning which they have no knowledge, one to whose adminis-

trations they must submit without edification and with disgust, or be driven from their birth-right. What characteristic of persecution is there, of which this measure does not partake? It is no answer to all this to say, the members of the church vote as members of the parish. If the principle is adopted, it must be of general application. We know of no case where the church includes half the members of the parish. A minister may therefore in all cases be imposed on a church, where not a single member is in favor of him. "A Baptist, a Calvinist, a Unitarian, a Methodist, a Universalist," any thing but a Papist, "may be put over" a church "where there is not a single member of that particular denomination."—But the church is a distinct body of men, known as such, ever since the days of the apostles, known to the laws of our country ever since its settlement, having its rights and duties, as much as any other body, and the same power to proceed by the vote of the majority of its members, as any other. The statute passed 20 years after the constitution, respecting public worship, recognizes their rights and privileges; that respecting pious and charitable donations vests in them, through their deacons (which officers they solely appoint) the power of holding and managing property, as fully as any other body.

The constitution undoubtedly repeals the statute of 1695, which authorizes the enforcement of a minister over a town or precinct against its consent. But it as undoubtedly does not repeal that of 1693, pointing out the mode of electing one, which is now in practice; because that is not in the smallest degree inconsistent with the rights secured by the constitution. The whole difficulty and obscurity on this subject arises from not keeping fixed in the mind the distinction between civil and ecclesiastical powers and rights, as we shall more fully illustrate presently. The statute of 1800 revises and repeals all the old laws, and in substance reenacts every principle of them, except that of 1695. It confirms to churches their accustomed privileges and liberties; it requires towns &c. to be provided with religious teachers and to support public worship; and it declares valid the contracts

which they shall make with such as they have chosen for their teachers or religious instructors. It says nothing about the mode and form of electing—having provided for the substance, it leaves the form to be regulated by usage. As the old law of 1693, respecting the mode, was what the lawyers call merely *directory*, and contained in itself no enforcing power, so it would be absurd to say, that the legislature, by making the repealing clause a general one, meant to *prohibit* a practice which had grown up under that harmless law. So every body understood, and so every body has practised ever since, and we have never heard of any indictment or penalty in consequence of it! The new statute was not passed because there was any existing evil felt or complained of, as is manifest from its not being made till twenty years after the constitution, and from every thing continuing since it passed precisely as it was before. It was done to bring the provisions of the different laws together in a convenient form into the new statute book, as it was in a multitude of other instances, without any change in the principle, and in some without even verbal alteration, as is the case with the statute respecting donations to pious and charitable uses, above mentioned, as far as it is revised. [See note B, at the end.]

If it was intended that the constitution should make the change now insisted on, surely those who framed and adopted it would know it. If the change is so important to the liberties of the people as is pretended, surely it would have been instantly and eagerly introduced into practice. But what is the fact? The subject was not agitated after the Constitution as it was after the Charter. A period of almost forty years has elapsed, and not a single instance has occurred of this new fashioned mode of constituting a minister. This has been a period too, the most wonderful for innovations that the world ever knew, yet this one thing has remained untouched. The people have given the most irrefragable proofs that they felt the want of no change, that they desired none. They have given the most decided practical illustration of their sense of their rights. It has so happened that amidst all the attempts to undermine religious order,

this principle and practice have remained unimpaired—a plain proof that the people were not only satisfied with the state of things, but were incapable of being made otherwise. The very few instances in which this principle has been attacked have been so overruled as to preserve it. The respectable council, which the church in Hingham invited to advise them in their difficulties, approved of their “disposition to adhere to the usages of the churches in the call and settlement of gospel ministers.” That also at Princeton determined, “that it would not be proper to attempt to merge the church in the congregation.” Through the good Providence of the Head of the church, we believe no instance has yet occurred, where the violation of the principle has been sanctioned, and we trust in him there never will.—In this connexion we take occasion to introduce a quotation from one of the most eminent, venerable, and venerated divines in the state, whose age enables him to look farther into past times, than almost any man remaining, and whose whole character entitles him to patriarchal authority. Dr. Lathrop of West Springfield, in his sermon 60 years after his ordination, affectionately addresses his people respecting the settlement of one to succeed him, and after pointing out the established mode of proceeding, and enjoining upon them an adherence to it, he says, “That the church should lead in this business is agreeable to common usage, to ancient statute, and the reason of the case. It is important, that in *civil* society, there should be a public teacher to inculcate the virtues and manners on which the happiness of society depends; such as truth, peace, justice, industry, temperance, and the other moral duties. The *gospel*, besides requiring the social virtues and duties, teaches the way of salvation, through a glorious Redeemer. In the christian minister, both characters are united, the *moral* and the *christian* teacher. The church consists of professed *christians*. They will choose a minister, who believes, and will teach, the whole gospel scheme. In the *christian* teacher the purposes of civil society are answered; for the gospel inculcates all social virtues and moral duties. But the purposes of a christian church cannot be answered by a mere moral

philosopher ; for he will have nothing to say in regard to the redemption of fallen men by the Son of God sent down from heaven.—On this reason was founded the statute, which required, that the church should lead in the call of a minister ; but at the same time, justly ordered that the town or parish should not be charged with his maintenance without their own concurrence.—Whether this statute now exists in form, or not, I cannot say. Be this as it may, ancient, continued and general usage may have sanctioned it as common law.” Thus far Dr. Lathrop.

Have the consequences of the innovation been duly considered ? Beside the oppression and persecution which we have shown it would occasion to the christian church, we think it would be easy to make it appear, that it would ere long wholly defeat the maintenance of religious worship, as the law now stands on that subject. In the first place, the members of the church would be turned out of doors, and driven to seek christian communion where they could find it, or do without. This nucleus, this centre of attraction, this vital principle being gone, what could be expected but a total disruption of the remainder of the body ? There is no bond of union among men of the world, but what is external and artificial. This is liable to be dissolved by a thousand occurrences. How soon, and how often, would occasions arise for separation, and for a nominal annexation to some unincorporated indefinite association, where they would be free from taxes, and free from the forms and restraints of religious worship too, if they chose, for such associations are under no obligation to have ministers or worship at all. Thus one parish would be frittered away after another, till Zion became a waste place, and the walls of Jerusalem were broken down.

What hardship does the established mode impose upon non-professors, so long as they have the right of negating the election of the church, made from candidates employed by themselves, and cannot have one imposed on them without their consent ? Surely *they* are not the people who are to be supposed most interested or most anxious for the settlement

of a gospel minister, and the regular administration of christian ordinances. While they employ a preacher, they are liable to no fine. For that purpose it is not necessary that he should be a settled minister. They surely have means enough in their hands to vex and oppress a church (if they are disposed to use them) by withholding such candidates as are agreeable to the church, or refusing their concurrence with the church's election, without having the power to say who shall be the church's presiding officer, who shall stand in the interesting relation of pastor, who shall administer the holy ordinances which are peculiar to christians. The majority of the non-professors may be persons who are indifferent to the subject of religion, or who do not believe in the divine word. If it be not so, why do they continue non-professors? The reason assigned for this in some cases is, that the articles of church fellowship are made too strict, in some particular churches. And from this is drawn the most powerful argument for depriving churches of the right of choosing their pastors. That this is not our case, we shall show most palpably by submitting to you a copy of the church covenant and mode of admission, which you will find as liberal as any in the Commonwealth. If a few churches do wrong in this respect, it is no reason for destroying the rights of all. It is an evil incident to human nature, and a remedy must be applied in the individual cases, as circumstances require and permit. If the church is large, it is probable the objectors are in the wrong—If it is small so much the easier the remedy—and surely there are facilities enough of that kind under the present order of things. No prudent man will ever try violent experiments, but in desperate cases. The one advocated would be like cutting off the head to cure a pain in the body—and even worse than that, it would be cutting it off for nothing, for no such pain exists. If there is any disease, it is in some minute extremity, and so slight as not to disturb the repose of the body. What is the evil complained of? We know of no instances where churches have misused their rights. We know of none where churches have improperly delayed to elect pastors. If such can be supposed, or

if one or two such may have ever occurred, shall that be the ground for overthrowing the whole system of order on this subject, which has existed so long and been attended with almost uninterrupted peace and prosperity in our christian community? If there is any evil of that kind, the remedy is ecclesiastical and not civil. Sister churches must adopt such measures, by withholding fellowship or otherwise, as the congregational institutions authorize. The civil power can never meddle with it, directly or indirectly, in any shape whatever, without violating one of the most important principles of American liberty. If the civil power *can* take from the church its aid in the support of its minister, it *cannot* take away its *right* to elect its own officers. This is an indefeasible right essential to the very existence of a congregational church. If any power can impose a pastor over it without its consent, it may do every other act relating to its organization and government—it may appoint its other officers and put members into it—for he who can do the greater can do the less. This right of election was guarded with extreme jealousy by our ancestors, and has not yet been renounced by their posterity. We hope we have not so forfeited the trust, that we shall be the first from whom it shall be wrested.

If a *parish* has a power of getting rid of a minister who has become justly obnoxious to them, which is the utmost extent to which any judicial decision has gone, it by no means follows that they have the right of *imposing* one on the church against its consent. The two cases bear no analogy to each other. The power of the parish to procure the dismissal of a minister exists only in cases where the minister has done something, or omitted something, which forfeits his civil contract, so that the consideration of the parish's promise to support him fails. This being determined by the proper authority, the parish are relieved from their contract, and are in the same situation they were in before they concurred with the church in his election. What amounts to a dissolution of the relation between a pastor and his church is not a question for the civil power to determine. When they have pronounced upon the situation of the civil contract their duty is

at an end. If they have or shall attempt to go beyond that, they go beyond their province. The corporation has got all the relief it needs, and the church must make a new election, which the parish shall approve, before it can have the aid of the parish in furnishing support ; unless the case should happen, which is a possible, though an improbable one, (for a church is to be supposed to be at least as desirous to get rid of an immoral or unfaithful minister as a parish,) we say it is *possible* that the church for some good reason, should not immediately cause the pastoral relation to be dissolved, and the parish should again elect and contract with the same man. In that case he would be, *ipso facto*, in the same situation he was in before the dissolution of the civil contract. No new ordination or installation would be necessary, but he would be to all intents the minister of the church and parish as he was before. This case furnishes an illustration of the distinct natures of the civil and ecclesiastical powers, duties and relations, and clearly shows that a parish has nothing to do with the business of ordination. [*See note C, at the end.*]

If it is admitted that a town or precinct may employ such preacher or teacher as they shall see fit, for a longer or shorter time, and by employing such a one as is not acceptable to the church, may not give the church an opportunity to elect a pastor ; or that if the church should elect one they may refuse to concur, and thus defeat the choice so far as relates to maintenance by the parish ; we affirm that public sentiment and common law require them to exercise these powers in such a manner as not to violate the laws of general benevolence and brotherly kindness : And we do not admit that they may settle one permanently, so as to deprive the church of all opportunity of being supplied with a gospel minister in the usual way, nor can we admit it, till the point shall be directly settled by the highest authority.* It is a sound max-

* What Judge Parsons says on this point in the case referred to below, he said as an individual ; and this was not *the point* expressly before the Court ; and Judge Sedgwick, in the same case, says, "It is worthy of observation that the mode of settling ministers has continued in every respect the same, since the establishment of the constitution, as it was before."

im of law that “no one shall so use his own rights as to impair the rights of others.”—But if we admit for argument’s sake, and say in the words of the eminent judge whose opinion is relied on for this doctrine, “that they may, without and against the consent of the church, elect a public *teacher*, and contract to support him”—here they must stop—for he immediately adds, “he cannot be considered as the *settled minister of the gospel*.” What then is he? A mere civil officer. Towns and parishes when acting by themselves are mere civil bodies, and nothing can emanate from them but what is of their nature. Their act of election of itself lays no foundation for any *ecclesiastical proceedings*, any more than the election of any other civil officer by any other civil body. If they choose to assert this *naked right*, to live up to this *strict law*, to abandon the beautiful system of order which ties together our religious community, they must take their new situation with all its appendages and consequences. They must be content to find a new rank in society for their new fashioned officer. Nothing can be clearer than that he will not be a *gospel minister*. They have in the outset renounced all connexion with the christian church. They have cut off the medium of communication with the associated family of christian churches. Let them not attempt to dispossess one member of the family of her birth-right, and then call upon her sisters to sanction the deed. If they choose to have any particular ceremony at the induction of their new officer, they have a right to institute it, in such form as is suited to their taste, but it ought also to be suited to their state. Let them not with one breath abjure christian fellowship, and with the next invite christian churches to ratify their proceedings. Having broken down the altars of christianity, let them not call upon her priests to consecrate the sacrilege. We may safely affirm, that it is no more according to ecclesiastical order for a parish thus situated to invite the representatives of churches to induct their new officer into office, than it would be for a town to invite them to induct their grammar school-master; and any ceremony which might be performed on the occasion, would no more make the one a gospel minister than

the other. The case of any other civil officer would afford the same illustration. The foundation, the ecclesiastical act, the church election, being wanting, there can be no superstructure. President Mather, in his book before mentioned, says, "If a man has not been elected by some church of Christ he is no pastor, but his ordination is a nullity." We have no doubt this is perfectly sound christian congregational doctrine.

A congregational ecclesiastical council is not a standing body, but is constituted for each particular occasion, as it arises. There are certain rules and principles, applicable to the subject, which must be complied with, to give existence to the body. There must be an ecclesiastical *act* or proceeding as the foundation of the convocation ; there must be an ecclesiastical *will* to move to the convocation ; and that *will* must operate and its operations be received and reciprocated, according to order. To remove all obscurity from the subject, let us translate the scholastic word *ecclesiastic*, into its simple synonyme, *church*, which is used both substantively and adjectively. We shall then say, there must be some church *act or proceeding* as a foundation of the convocation ; there must be a church *will*, that is, the will of some church as a body or some individual or individuals who are church members and are affected by some church proceeding ; and this *will* must be made manifest in the regular way to the churches whose advice &c. is desired, and must also be regularly acted upon by them. The application of these principles to the convocation of a council for the ordination of a pastor is perfectly obvious. Without these requisites, a council does not exist, and that which does not exist, cannot act. The point is so plain that no attempt to illustrate it could make it more so.*

But why should a parish abandon the universal custom, and prefer such a *teacher* to a *gospel minister*, if they have power so to do ? Do they desire to hold no communion nor intercourse with the christian community ? Are not their interests as well secured without the innovation as with it, and their happiness much better ? Will they pay no regard to

* Still, for the satisfaction of some who have expressed doubts, we have made the attempt, in our remarks on the result.

the *advice* of the eminent Judge on whose *opinion* they rely for the support of their position? After saying that the *teacher* above described cannot be considered as the *settled minister of the gospel*, according to the usages of the congregational churches, he adds, “an adherence to these usages so manifestly tends to the preservation of good order, peace, and harmony among the people in the exercise of their religious privileges, it may be presumed that a departure from them will never be admitted by any town, *but in cases of necessity.*”

—Here would be the place to show, that if there ever was a case, which, more than all others, should be exempted from this exception, ours is the one. But we presume there will be no occasion to come to that question. If there should, the opposition in the parish will make a representation of the facts out of which this inference arises; it is therefore unnecessary that we should enter on that exposition. We have already said much more than we intended. The want of time to condense our remarks, must be our apology for their length and diffuseness. Still we have left much that might have been said to illustrate and enforce our positions.

On the whole, from this investigation, and every view we have been able to take, we are confirmed in the belief of the following propositions.

That the congregational churches in this state, existing as distinct but associated bodies, are constituted according to the principles of the primitive churches, founded on apostolic authority :

That these distinct bodies or particular churches have certain rights and privileges, of which no earthly power can lawfully deprive them; the most important of which is, that of electing their own Pastors :

That since the settlement of this country, this right has never been denied, or questioned, excepting for a short period a century ago :

That if the object now was, to form such a regulation respecting the election and settlement of gospel ministers, as should be best calculated to secure the rights, privileges, peace, order, happiness, of all branches of the community, in

every department thereof, none could be devised which would so well answer the purpose, as the one under which we now live, and have lived happily for several generations :

And that such are the distinct natures of civil and ecclesiastical powers, duties, functions and relations, as to lead to this necessary conclusion, that the respectable clergymen and laymen before whom we appear, are not here in such a manner and on such an occasion, as to be recognized by congregational principles—there having been no ecclesiastical proceedings as the foundation, and no ecclesiastical request as the moving cause, of their convocation, and consequently there being nothing of an ecclesiastical nature for them to perform. The ecclesiastical body, the christian church, existing in this place, has chosen no pastor, of course, desires no ordination, nor has invited her sister churches to convene on this occasion for any purpose whatever: We, therefore, though we receive you with much pleasure as christian friends, are bound in duty to ourselves as a member of the christian family, in duty to the congregational churches, in the community whose rights we are called to defend, and in duty to the Head of the church, from whom we receive these rights, to enter our solemn Protest against your taking any further measures in relation to the ordination of Mr. Alvan Lamson, in this place.

As soon as the reading of this paper was finished, the chairman of the parish committee arose and said, they did not request to have Mr. Lamson ordained over the church. We remarked that, not having been favoured with a sight of the letter missive, we knew not precisely what the request was, but had understood it to be, to ordain him over the church, as well as the parish. A principal member of the council looked at his letter, but gave us no information of its contents.—The parish committee then read several passages from judicial decisions relating to parishes, and produced the paper with signatures before mentioned, also a list, as they said, of the legal voters in the parish, and a statement respecting taxes. Having on their paper the names of some of the neutral members of the church, as before explained, and

of some members of other churches, who reside and have communed here, they took great pains to persuade the council that they had the majority of the church with them, notwithstanding they had just disclaimed the wish to have the candidate ordained over the church. This inconsistency, and this irregular kind of evidence, met with no check or note of disapprobation from the council. We remarked to the council, that the most correct evidence they could have of the state of the church and parish was from the official copies of their votes which had just been read ; that on these, we were willing to rest the question ; that the vote of the church, which had been taken since all the signing of papers and other measures, put *that* subject at rest ; that we objected to their receiving the papers which had been just offered them, until we had had an opportunity to examine them, and unless we should be permitted to introduce evidence to explain them : That this would lead into a large and unpleasant field of investigation, but we had no objection to it, if they chose that course. They were inclined to admit the papers, and of consequence could not wholly refuse to hear us, though, we are sorry to say, we saw in some of them great impatience to *bolt* the door, instead of *opening* it.—We, in the first place, proved the threat by which a member of the church had been kept from the meeting, and were proceeding to show with what views the neutral members had signed the paper before-mentioned, as appeared by their own declarations, but were not suffered to proceed.—We remarked with regard to resident communicants who belong to other churches, that it was well known that neither the Platform nor congregational usage permitted their voting with a church with which they were not expressly in covenant, and that it had never been the practice in this church ; but in this instance there were as many of that description against the candidate, as for him. The moderator then told us that it was the practice for such to vote in his church, and asked this strange question, “ How many churches are there of our Lord ? ” It would have been proper to have answered him, that he had pretty good authority for believing, that there were *seven* in *Asia* in St. John’s time,

and there were perhaps 700 at this time in Massachusetts. But we were so surprised at such a question, from such a source, that we made no reply at all.

The gentlemen appointed to represent the opposition in the parish attempted to address the council, but before the first of them had got through his introduction, or uttered three sentences, some members grew impatient, and interrupted and so disconcerted him, that he sat down and said no more. Not having come in, in season to hear all that had passed, it is true that he made a remark relative to a point which had been sufficiently discussed; yet, a small portion of candor would have allowed him a moment longer to explain himself. The style of rebuke was very unbecoming to a man of his age, and the stations he had held. This proceeding so operated on the other gentleman who was expected to address the council, that he said nothing, excepting that the opposition was not grounded in religious opinions, and that he had no charge to make against Mr. Lamson's moral character. If he had explained himself, he might have said, we do not oppose his opinions, because he has taken care not to let us know what they are; and that, although we do not allege that he has violated either of the ten commandments in the literal sense, yet we affirm that he has developed traits of character here, which show him unfit for our minister.

The parish committee now reiterated before the council, what they had taken infinite pains to proclaim abroad every where, and which they knew was the only plausible reason they could urge for the settlement of their candidate,—that the opposition was altogether of a doctrinal nature, and that therefore there was no prospect of a greater union; although before he came, they had given a directly contrary opinion. As full proof of their present assertion, they drily stated that Mr. Bates had been here fifteen years—forgetting to remember that 4 out of 5 of their own body, and 5 out of 6 of the church members who signed the letters missive, and 8 of the 14 who voted for Mr. Lamson, were admitted to the church during Mr. Bates' ministry. We averred to the council our most solemn conviction that the division was not according to religious opinions, and that we might be much better united.

We think we have now stated the substance of what passed before the council. We felt ourselves injured by being precluded from making the explanations which we thought important, while the *ex parte* papers of the committee were admitted as evidence. We, however, derived some consolation from observing that one or two very respectable members of the council were impressed with the importance of considering the rights of churches, and from the belief, that with that point in view, together with the facts which had appeared before them, it was impossible that the council could think of establishing Mr. Lamson here. We were willing he should depart in peace.—The council continued their deliberations till the evening, when we were informed that the ordination was to take place the next day. At the commencement of the exercises on the 29th, the following was read as their *Result*.

[We have numbered the paragraphs for the convenience of reference in our remarks upon them.]

Result of the Ecclesiastical Council, convened at Dedham, October 28, 1818, to assist at the Ordination of Rev. Alvan Lamson, over the First Parish in Dedham.

AT a meeting of an Ecclesiastical Council convened at Dedham, agreeably to letters missive from the First Parish in Dedham, October 28, 1818, at 9 o'clock A. M.

Present the following Churches with their Pastors and Delegates—*

Church in Bridgewater, Rev. Dr. Reed—Hon. Daniel Howard.

University Church, Cambridge, Rev. Dr. Kirkland, Rev. Dr. Ware, and Professor Willard.

Rev. Mr. Bradford's Church in Roxbury, Dea. David Corey.

Church in Needham, Rev. Mr. Palmer—Dr. Samuel Gould.

— Quincy, Rev. Mr. Whitney—Dea. Josiah Adams.

— Roxbury, Rev. Mr. Gray—Dea. Abner Child.

Church in Federal street Boston, Rev. Mr. Channing—Hon. John Davis.

* The churches in Medfield and Lancaster were sent to, but did not attend.

West Church in Boston, Rev. Mr. Lowell—Dea. William C. Hunneman.

Church in Waltham, Rev. Mr. Ripley—Jonathan Cooledge, Esq.

— Dedham, Rev. Mr. White—Dea. George Ellis.

— Dover, Rev. Mr. Sanger—Capt. Josiah Newell.

— Weston, Rev. Mr. Field—Ebenezer Hobbs, Esq.

— Charlestown, Rev. Mr. Walker— Mr. John Tufts.

The council was organized by the choice of Rev. Dr. Reed, Moderator, and Rev. Ralph Sanger, Scribe. After prayer by the moderator, the proceedings in relation to the call of Mr. Alvan Lamson, were presented and read.

On the part of a majority of the church, and a minority of the parish, committees appeared and protested against the council's proceeding to the ordination of Mr. Lamson.

After a patient hearing of both parties, on the question of the *right* of the council to proceed to the ordination—and the *expediency* of thus proceeding—and having made inquiry respecting the qualifications of the candidate, and heard his declaration of his views, the council proceeded to discuss the subjects before them—

After which, the following votes, having been deliberately considered, and fully discussed, were passed—

1st. Whereas cases may exist, in which a majority of a church do not concur with the religious society in the call of a minister, *Voted*, as the sense of this council, that such cases may still be so urgent, as to authorize an ecclesiastical council to proceed to the ordination of the candidate over said society—

2d. *Voted*, that this council is now ready to proceed to the ordination of Mr. Alvan Lamson over the First Parish in Dedham—

3d. *Voted*, that the following gentleman, viz. Rev. Dr. Reed, Rev. Dr. Kirkland, Rev. Mr. Channing, Rev. Mr. Lowell, and Hon. John Davis, be a committee to prepare a result to be reported at the adjournment—

4th. *Voted*, that this committee make such communication, as they think proper, to the committee of the parish, concerning the ordination—

5th. *Voted*, that the time of ordination be on the morrow, at 11 o'clock A. M. and that the following gentlemen be requested to perform on this occasion, viz.

Rev. Mr. FIELD to make the Introductory Prayer.

Rev. Dr. REED the Ordaining Prayer.

Rev. Mr. PALMER to deliver the Charge.

Rev. Mr. WHITE to present the Right Hand of Fellowship.

Rev. Mr. GRAY to make the concluding Prayer.

This meeting was then adjourned till tomorrow at 9 o'clock A. M.

October 29. The council met according to adjournment. Rev. Mr. Channing was chosen assistant Scribe.

Voted to hear the result of the committee, which was as follows—

1. The council here convened, esteem it to be due to themselves and to the Christian community, to explain, as far as time will permit, the views and motives by which they have been influenced in coming to the decision which has now been announced. It has been their labor to bring to this important transaction dispassionate minds and a sense of their responsibility. They trust that they have given evidence of their desire to hear patiently every statement which could guide them to a fair result. Partaking as they do in a frail and fallible nature, they are sensible that they may have erred. But having sought the best lights, having implored guidance from God, and being governed as they trust by a sincere regard to the interests of this Christian society, and of our common religion, they have a strong hope, that their deliberations and measures will be followed by a divine blessing.

2. Whilst the council cherish sentiments of tenderness and respect towards the church in this place, and claim no power to set over it a pastor against its consent, they also consider themselves as bound to consider the rights and interests of this parish, and they have a firm persuasion that circumstances may exist, in which a minister may be ordained over a parish without the concurrence of the church connected with it.

3. The council regard the well known usage, according to which, the first step in electing a pastor is taken by the church,

as in the main wise and beneficial. But they believe that this usage, founded on different circumstances of the Christian community, and on different laws of the commonwealth from those, which now exist, is not to be considered as universally necessary. In the present state of our religious societies, and under the provisions of our present constitution and laws, they conceive that the spirit and end of the usage are to be regarded rather than the letter ; and that, as it has no other purpose than to secure a pious ministry and the peace and prosperity of religious communities, we are bound to dispense with it, when, after serious deliberation, we are persuaded, that adherence to it will create or increase division, or postpone indefinitely the settlement of a christian minister. In such a case, we must consult a higher rule, the general spirit of the gospel, and not expose to imminent peril, the best interests of a society, through regard to a usage, which may often operate injuriously in periods like the present, when difference of religious opinion is widely extended, and when the number of church members often bears a small proportion to the whole society.

4. The council would further observe, that by the laws of the commonwealth, a parish is obliged to settle a minister, and is exposed to a penalty by neglect ; and they conceive, that this provision makes it the duty of a parish to obtain a minister for itself, when the dissent of the church renders such settlement otherwise impracticable or impossible.

5. They would also observe, that where a parish proceed to the choice of a minister in opposition to a vote of the church, it is not therefore to be supposed that the church has no influence in the affair. Such a vote, it is believed, has always an effect on individuals in the parish ; and when, notwithstanding such effect, the parish proceed to elect the candidate in question by a large majority, this fact is an indication of a state of mind in the society, which ought to be regarded with great deference by the church and which a council cannot overlook.

6. The council here convened, do indeed esteem the concurrence of the church and parish in the settlement of a minister as very desirable ; but they believe that each of these bodies has a right to elect a pastor for itself, when it shall be satisfied

that its own welfare and the general interests of religion require the measure ; this right being secured to the church by the essential principles of congregational polity, and to the parish by the constitution and laws of the commonwealth, as well as by the free principles of the same polity, and of the gospel of Christ.

7. From all these considerations it is believed, that in cases like the present, no invariable rule is furnished to councils by the usage of which we have spoken ; but that in each case, they must be governed by a wise and enlarged regard to the interests of religion, taking into view the situation both of the church and the parish, and the bearing of their measures on the whole christian community.

8. The council, having been led by these views, to consider the expediency of ordaining Mr. Alvan Lamson over the First Parish in Dedham, have unanimously voted to proceed to that solemn act. In forming this decision, they have availed themselves of every method within their reach, for ascertaining the precise state of this society, and the consequences which may result either from ordaining or refusing to ordain Mr. Lamson. They wish not to conceal the difficulties of the case before them ; but they have a strong conviction, on which it is their duty to act, that greater good is to be expected to this society, and to the church in general, from the course on which they have resolved, than from any other within their choice. Among the many circumstances which have influenced their judgment, but which cannot be detailed, they would mention, as important, the following facts ; viz. that a large majority of the parish are in favour of Mr. Lamson ; that a majority of the church would also be in his favour, were all the brethren included in that body, who statedly communicate in this place, and who in some places would be admitted to vote in church affairs ; that Mr. Lamson has inspired a warm attachment ; and that the minority of the parish disclaim opposition to him on the ground of religious opinion, or of objections to the purity of his character. The result of their deliberate inquiries is, that, in the present circumstances of this people, there is no reason to expect as great a degree of union

from hearing other candidates, as from the ordination of Mr. Lamson.

9. The council cannot close this result without expressing their sorrow on account of the want of unanimity in this place on this interesting occasion. They cannot, however, but express the satisfaction with which they witnessed the singular self-command manifested by both parties in the public discussions before them, a circumstance too honorable to be passed over in silence, and which cannot but be regarded as a pre-sage of a happier condition of the society.

10. To those who have invited us, this council beg leave to recommend earnestly a spirit of conciliation. Brethren, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Let not religion, which was designed to be a bond of union, a source of kind affection, become an occasion of discord. Remember that the ministry which you establish will not contribute to your salvation, any farther than it shall teach you to love one another. Be equitable and kind in construing the motives of those who differ from you. Be frank in acknowledging any errors or want of deference to your brethren, which may have mingled with your proceedings. Let not the ties of friendship be dissolved, the offices of neighbourhood, or the courtesies of life be impaired, by diversity of religious opinion. Do honour to Christianity and its institutions, by showing that they render you more affectionate, mild, forgiving, that they have power to form you after the image of your Lord. We also beseech you to spare this council the pain which they must feel, should they learn, that the measures intended for your peace and spiritual prosperity have failed of their end. The God of peace be with you, and bless you, and keep you to his heavenly kingdom.

Voted, that this result be accepted, and that it be read at the public meeting for ordination.

The Council proceeded to the ordination of Mr. Alvan Lamson, agreeably to the preceding votes.

Attest,

JOHN REED, *Moderator.*

RALPH SANGER, *Scribe.*

This document and the letter missive which gave rise to it should be preserved as curiosities connected with our ecclesiastical history. Beside the claim to a permanent existence derived from their singularity, they have a more important one, founded on the sanction under which they came forth, even that of the presiding and theological officers of our University, as well as of some other distinguished divines. While this gives title to a respectful consideration, it calls more loudly for an exposition of every deviation from principle. If there be any thing which in itself has a tendency to disturb the order and unsettle the foundations of our religious polity, that tendency will receive additional momentum from some of the names under whose patronage it proceeds. In the examination therefore we must be indulged in every freedom of remark, which will conduce to the illustration of the subject.

We suppose, while it is practically admitted, that no society or association, however small and insignificant, can subsist, without some set of regulations or system of organization, it will not be denied, that something, which may properly bear the name of ecclesiastical polity, is necessary to every religious community. So far as the mind of HIM, who is head over *all things* to the church, can be discovered on this subject, so far all his disciples will feel themselves bound to conform to it. However ready we may be to grant, that this mind is not made manifest in much minuteness of regulation, and even that some variety of modification in this respect, may be suitable to the varying state of the church, in different times and places, we maintain that system and order are always and every where indispensable; and that no change is ever to be made, unless, on an enlarged view of the subject, there is strong reason to believe it will be productive of more good, than enough to balance the evil of disturbing the established state of things.—There is seldom such an opportunity of introducing a new organization, as was possessed by the settlers of New-England. That they used it with wonderful sagacity and discretion, and in as much conformity to scripture directions and primitive practice, as any other branch of the Christian church now in being, we firmly believe, and, as their

descendants and the inheritors of their system, are happy to declare. But we may save ourselves all trouble of inquiring at this time, what system of polity is best, it being only necessary to ascertain what *Congregationalism* is to settle all questions which grow out of the documents before us. Nor need we spread our inquiries as broad as that. Those parts of it which relate to Councils, and the Ordination and Settlement of Ministers are all that we now have occasion minutely to examine.

Congregationalism is that system of religious polity, which regulates a body of professing christians, united by a church covenant, *congregating* together for the celebration of all christian ordinances, having no officers but those of its own election, acknowledging no controuling power without or independent of itself; but holding communion with sister churches, by way of mutual care and watchfulness, participation in the ordinances, transfer of members, exchange of pastoral labors, and the forming of councils for advice and assistance in the ordination or induction and removal of pastors, and in all cases of difficulty or dispute of an ecclesiastical nature, or for the recognition of new churches.

A *Congregational Ecclesiastical Council* is a body, consisting of the elders and messengers (in modern language, the pastors and delegates) of an indefinite number of churches, having an occasional and temporary existence, called into life by some ecclesiastical body or being which has an ecclesiastical subject proper for their consideration, having powers of an advisory* nature limited to that subject, and expiring when a decision is had upon it, or the consideration of it is withdrawn.

When we reflect that the whole object of such councils is the promotion of church fellowship and christian order, and that giving and accepting the invitation for the formation of a council are among the chief acts of fellowship, the principles and powers appertaining to their origin and office will naturally unfold themselves. There are two leading principles

**Advisory*. This may not be a dictionary word, but it is freely used by a very eminent literary character and divine, on this subject.

which will serve to explain all others, which are, the occasional nature of their existence, and the advisory nature of their power.

They are not standing bodies, but are constituted for each particular occasion as it arises, and expire with it. The occasion then must first exist, before any step can be taken towards their creation. There must be something of an ecclesiastical nature to be done which is a proper object of their operation, before they can be called on to do any thing. When the object of operation exists, then the foundation is laid. The next step is, for those who have occasion for the services of a council to take measures to convene one. None can have occasion, but such as have an ecclesiastical existence, or desire a council to sanction their steps towards such existence, and receive them into the congregational family. All others are strangers and foreigners, and can in no shape intermeddle in these proceedings.

The *occasions* on which councils are called, are, The gathering of a church, Some case of difficulty wherein a church wishes for advice, The ordination or installation of the Pastor of a church, The dissolution of the pastoral relation where a removal is contemplated, Some case of controversy between a church and its pastor, Some case of controversy between a church and a private member or members respecting discipline.—In the three former cases there is and can be but one party to the council. It is convoked by the church as a body, acting by its unanimous or major vote, for a purpose affecting *them* in their collective capacity, and no other ecclesiastical being. If any of the members, however, are not in favor of the proposed act, they may assign reasons to the council why they should not proceed to perform it.—In the three latter cases, there are two parties concerned, and the council may either be called by them both, and then it is a *mutual* council, or by one, on the refusal of the other to join, and then it is an *ex parte* council. These are all strictly ecclesiastical occasions, and all have direct relation to an individual church, from which, or from some member of which, as such, the invitation proceeds.

The Platform also recognizes a process of disciplining an offending sister church, which is similar in principle to that practised with an individual member of a particular church, and in the last stage of it, the offended church may lay the subject before a council of neighboring churches. This is purely ecclesiastical and conformable to the principles we have laid down, but of a different class from the preceding cases, and is very seldom carried into practice in modern times.

There is one other occasion on which councils of our churches are now sometimes called, which, if ecclesiastical in its nature, is not founded on the proceedings of a particular church, and therefore not congregational, that is, for the ordination of missionaries. This practice is not recognized in the Platform, nor in any of the treatises on congregational usages which we have seen. The anonymous pamphlet mentioned in a previous note speaks of two instances of the kind, but gives no account of the manner in which the councils were convoked, if there were any. The method now in practice, we understand, is, for the Missionary Society, under whose auspices the candidate is to be sent forth, to invite the council. These societies being specially constituted for the purpose of building up the christian church, having elected the candidates to act for them in planting new churches, and the members of the societies and the candidates being generally *members* of congregational churches, some may consider them entitled to this act of fellowship. But if it be necessary that the missionary candidates should have hands laid on them before they are sent forth, we could wish they should obtain it in some other way, in order that the symmetry of our congregational system might not be marred by this single instance of apparent deviation from its principles, especially if it is to be made the occasion of undermining that system altogether. But this being a case peculiar in its nature, and having its own particular rules and object, stands as an exception to the general mode of ordaining, and is not to be extended beyond its own special purposes. To use it for any other occasion or purpose is an abuse of it, and a

palpable violation of congregational principles. It cannot be made a subterfuge to cover up disorderly proceedings in the settlement of a minister. Every attempt of that kind is null and void, as we shall show more fully presently.

As councils are not bodies whose existence is continuous, neither are they of spontaneous growth. The foundation of their existence is the ecclesiastical object and the ecclesiastical invitation which lead to their convocation. The act of the churches in voting to comply with the request, and send delegates to form constituent parts of the council, is but the medium through which the council is brought into being, not the potential cause. A council is analogous as to its origin and power to a board of referees on a submission out of court, or *in pais*, as the lawyers express it, or to a number of neighbors called in by a man to advise and assist him on a special occasion. The power to act is derived from the parties desiring their advice, and confined to the subject submitted to them. Each church sent to is, in its collective capacity, one of the referees. The church cannot go in a body, it therefore attends and acts by its representatives or delegates. The churches in this state have never adopted the principle of consociations or presbyteries, or any other regulation by which power is given to any man or body of men out of, or independent of, themselves, to do any authoritative act whatever. The power of councils is merely advisory—nor can they volunteer *that* service. They cannot come till they are asked, nor extend their inquiries beyond the point submitted, and then their decision may be regarded or not, as shall seem best to the party asking. To be sure in cases where there are two parties, if the council is regularly brought into existence, the party acting as they advise, is justified in the eye of the law, and of the ecclesiastical community. The simple consideration that the party desiring a council is at perfect liberty in determining the number, and in making the selection, and at perfect liberty to call one at any time, or not at all, makes palpably manifest the seat of the originating power, and seems to preclude all further argument about it.—But for the sake of those who have an undefined notion about the

power of a council being derived from the churches which are represented, let us consider that point a moment in another view. This proposition must mean, if it means any thing, that the churches have in themselves a power to constitute a council at any time when they please, without being moved thereto by the party concerning whose affairs they are to consult. But what churches, and how many, shall undertake it, and shall they get together? Who shall begin the convening process, or end it, or determine its extent? Let us suppose a case. Take the one in question if you please. The church in Waltham, for instance, finds out by some means or other, that something is doing in Dedham about the settlement of a minister, and desires to have a hand in the business. She votes to send delegates to a council there. But how does she know that there is to be a council? Perhaps no other churches have heard of the business, or if they have, do not think it worth while to meddle with it. Shall Waltham send to Lancaster, and Bridgewater, and Quincy, and such others as she takes a fancy to sit with, to make up a council for the occasion? But suppose also the church in Brookline should hear of the affair, and feel an inclination to have a concern in it—and that in Medford—and that in West Springfield—or any other, and many others—need we proceed further in exposing the absurdity of the notion?

Let us consider another notion—that of a council being convoked by any other than an ecclesiastical body or being. If there are any who really hold this doctrine, we would ask them to what extent they carry it, and by what limit they bound it? Has every man, or body of men, this right or power, at all times, and on all occasions? If not, who? and when? and wherefore? Shall a town or precinct when it has elected a public teacher of religion, in opposition to the church, have that right? Their officer has no other than a civil relation to them, and can have no other. It is the duty also of their grammar schoolmaster to pray with and exhort his scholars; will they not also call a council to lay hands on him? A lodge of freemasons is desirous to have their grand master inducted with peculiar solemnity, and perhaps would

like a council on the occasion. Shall the churches send one at their request? A captain of a militia company may have a fancy for an extraordinary ceremony, and may take it into his head that a council would set it off to advantage. A controversy may arise between a town and some inhabitant, in which the inhabitant may feel himself aggrieved, shall he have an ecclesiastical council to consider the subject? There is a difficulty between the schoolmaster and the town, shall there be a council to settle it?—The truth is, every class of social organization, whether ecclesiastical, civil, military, masonic, or of any other description, has its own characteristics, its principles of vitality, and rules of proceeding, according to which it exists and operates within its own sphere; but *between* them there is no medium of communication. The grand system which comprehends them all, like the principle of gravitation, keeps them all in their places, but keeps them apart. The electric fluid which circulates in each is bounded by its atmosphere, and has no conductor from one to the other. A town has in its nature no more of the ecclesiastical principle, than the military company, or the masonic lodge. A majority of its inhabitants may even be deists or atheists, without being chargeable with hypocrisy. It is a civil body, existing for certain purposes, supposed beneficial to the community. It is required by law to have a public teacher of piety, religion and morality, but the law knows nothing about any ordination for him, or any ecclesiastical character attached to him. It is not even necessary that he should be settled or permanent. He may be shifted as often as caprice, or any other motive shall lead to it. If the town, &c. is not without one “for the term of three months in any six months,” the law is answered. He stands on exactly the same footing with the grammar schoolmaster as it respects the town, and has no clerical character, and can have none, but as he is called and settled by a church. What a congregational church is, for the purpose of electing a pastor, has already been abundantly explained, and is one of those things over which there hangs not a shadow of doubt.

But further, the act of sending delegates to a council, when requested, is an act of *fellowship*, which churches cannot without good cause refuse to each other, and is in its nature reciprocal, being founded on mutual rights growing out of a previous compact, express or implied. If therefore a town or precinct has a right to send to a church, a church has the same to send to a town or precinct. For the form of a letter missive on such an occasion, the politico-ecclesiastical community must be indebted to the committee who framed the one which we have inserted above, and on which we shall make a remark or two presently. To whom shall it be directed? It cannot be acted upon but in legal town or precinct meeting. The *teacher* has nothing in particular to do with such meetings. They must be called by warrant from the selectmen or parish committee, and notified and conducted in all the usual forms. It would be far from impossible that a majority of those who should happen to convene should be disposed to turn the subject into ridicule, and should depute half a dozen blasphemers to attend the holy convocation. If there may be one town or parish thus represented, the whole council may consist of such. And it would be nothing wonderful, if a church, which should have so little regard to religious order and the principles of their polity, as to listen to the application of such a body, should choose to send to such.

In the present case, there not having been any ecclesiastical act or proceeding which laid the foundation for the convocation of a council, nor any call for one from any ecclesiastical body or being, curiosity is excited to look into the nature of the precept which commanded the ready attendance of such a number of the congregational family. The parish committee, who sign this non-descript letter missive, introduce it by this salutation, “The *religious Congregational Society* in the First Parish in Dedham, to the Church of Christ in —, under the Pastoral care of the Reverend —.” They then inform, that “the Inhabitants of the *First Parish* in Dedham have elected Mr. ALVAN LAMSON their public Protestant teacher of Piety, Religion and Morality, and have invited

him to settle in the work of the Gospel Ministry with them," which invitation he has accepted ; they therefore request the churches sent to, "to assist in the ordination of Mr. Lamson, as a Gospel Minister over the *Church and Society* constituting said *Parish*." What strange talk ! and to complete it, they subscribe "your Brethren in Christ" ! But for whom do they say this—for *themselves*, or "the *Religious Congregational Society* in the First Parish in Dedham," or the "*Church and Society* constituting said *Parish*?" If for themselves, this is the first public profession of christianity which three of them have made ; and now perhaps they may think they have as good a right to vote with the church, as three other men who have lately undertaken to do so, without having any connexion with it. But they place at the end of their names the words, "Committee on behalf of said *Parish*." Perhaps then they make the salutation on account of the "**CHURCH** and *Society* constituting said *Parish*"!!! How modest, and how kind !

But why all these evolutions? Why not say, the First *Parish* in Dedham to the Church of Christ in, &c.? Was it because they feared the ears of the churches would be struck too palpably by the irregularity of being invited by a parish to ordain a man over a church, which had not elected him ? Was it therefore thought politic to involve the subject in a phraseology containing the expression *Religious Congregational Society*, which might be understood as including both, and intended to distinguish between the Congregational Society and the Episcopal church within the territorial limits of the first parish or precinct ? What else can be meant by the expression, *Congregational Society in the First Parish* ? But then, their request to have him ordained "over the *Church and Society* constituting said *Parish*," must mean over the *Episcopal Church* and *Congregational Society*. There is no Congregational Society in, or constituting a part of the first Parish, in any other sense. There is a society known by the name of the First Parish in Dedham ; but none by the name of the "*Religious Congregational Society in the First Parish*."—But such jargon is a proper attendant and a constituent part

of a proceeding, begun in disorder, and which we shall find deeper involved in confusion every step that is taken.—Look at it again—an ideal body, the substance whereof is not, addresses fifteen actual christian bodies, to come and ordain a man over that ideal body, and a real one like themselves, which has never elected him, and has no desire for any connexion with him!—and to this strange voice these flocks of Christ give ear, so far as to respond the sound, not considering from whence it comes, or not being duly *warned*, that instead of the usual salutation of a sister church, it is a call from an unknown source, for help to burst the door of a neighbouring fold, to let a stranger in!—and this is an expression of the *fellowship* of the CHURCHES!!!

It is to be hoped that the scribes of these churches have made a record of this letter missive at large, for the inspection of after ages, and as a model for all future occasions. It would also be well for them to note, that the council found themselves obliged to determine that they could not ordain Mr. Lamson *over the Church*, but had proceeded to induct him as a civil officer; and discovering in him, as well as in those who invited them to assemble, a most remarkable missionary spirit, had *ordained* him as a *missionary*.

We have now arrived at the question of *Ordination*. Having *proved* that the body of men assembled on this occasion were not a Congregational Ecclesiastical Council, we will take the liberty to ask, what were they? What power had they? Whence did they derive it? We should be exceedingly happy to receive direct and explicit answers to these questions; but as we never shall, we proceed to answer them ourselves. We say then, they were nothing but private individuals, and that they had no more power when assembled here, than each individual had by his own fire-side. Think not when you look at some of the names composing this body, that these are bold assertions. Names cannot subvert principles, nor turn error into truth.

If it be possible to add evidence {to demonstration, these doctrines will appear in a still stronger light, when we have looked a little into the subject of ordination.—What is ordi-

nation? This is a difficult question to answer—not so much perhaps from any uncertainty which originally rested upon it, as from the confusion in which the scholastic disputes and mystical jargon of a long succession of interested or deluded men have involved it. By whom is the rite to be performed? This too has divided the christian world to an equal degree. Had we time and ability we should not here be disposed to go into an investigation of the various ideas and practices which have prevailed in different ages and places of the church. It is enough for our present purpose, if we can understand and explain those, which have existed and are established in the religious communion to which we belong, and by which we must be governed, while we choose to remain in that communion. To illustrate these, it may be necessary to advert to some others.

According to the principles of our Platform, the clerical character cannot exist without the pastoral office, any more than a man can be a king without a kingdom, a guardian without a ward, a schoolmaster without scholars, a husband without a wife. The essence of the official character was considered to be derived from the election, to which the ceremony of ordination or induction, which were synonymous, was an appendage; both indispensable to the completion of the character; and the latter not capable of subsisting without the former. Hence it was held necessary that a person who had been pastor of one church, if removed to another, should be reordained, that is, should be inducted with the same ceremony as at first; and it was even doubted whether a pastor could administer the ordinances to any church but his own. The act of ordination was considered as in fact performed by the church, whose pastor elect was the subject of it, which they might do, either by their own elders, if they had any, or even by a committee of the brethren selected for that purpose, if they had none, or by such neighbouring elders as they should invite.

When we first gave our attention to this subject, we thought that our fathers had so fearfully fixed their eyes on the assumed powers of prelacy, that they had wandered far out of

the way on the other hand. But on considering it more closely, and looking a little more into the nature of things, we saw occasion in some measure to alter our opinion. We pretend not to be sufficiently learned on this subject to go much into history or abstract reasoning upon it. Yet our common sense would lead us to conclude that the *office*, employment, or service, must be the foundation of the *official character*, and contain the principles which determine its nature ; and that those for whom the *service* is to be performed, having both the right and the power to designate the *agent*, which is the substance, must of consequence be considered as having the controul of that which is circumstantial. We suppose it will not be contended among congregationalists, that the laying on of hands of itself has any tendency to increase or change the qualifications of the candidate ; or that there is any thing impressed which is indelible, according to the fantastical notion of former times ; nor do we expect to hear much about uninterrupted succession.

It is well known, that at the time the Platform was framed, our community consisted partly of those who held the power of the church to be in the church officers or presbytery, and partly of those who held it to be in the brethren. The latter prevailed in introducing their ideas principally into the instrument, though with some modifications in accommodation to the others. Hence there resulted a mixed system in some degree. The congregational principles, that there could be no admission, dismissal, or disciplining of members, or appointment or removal of officers, without the voice of the brethren, were fully established. Yet it was held, that a church, not organized with its proper officers, could perform no acts, but such as were necessary to its organization, or the preservation of its existence and rights. Having spoken of the *election* of officers, the framers of the instrument say, “ church officers are not only to be chosen by the church, but also to be *ordained* by imposition of hands and prayer, with which at the ordination of elders, fasting is to be joined. This ordination we account nothing else but the solemn putting a man into his place and office in the church, where-

unto he had right before by election ; being like the installing of a magistrate in the commonwealth. Ordination therefore is not to go before but follow election.” The rite they considered an essential prerequisite to entering on the duties of the office, as much as the oath of a magistrate, and that, like that, it necessarily followed the election. It was to be administered as before mentioned. They were extremely cautious not to make it *necessary* to apply to any external source for the investiture. They saw no objection to calling in neighbouring elders to witness and assist in the ceremony, especially if the church had none of its own. At that day, it was common for the churches to have ruling as well as teaching elders, and some of them had a plurality of the latter. We suppose very few instances occurred of ordination by private brethren, though probably some did. The custom was general of sending for neighbouring elders, and the more so, as the office of ruling elder was gradually discontinued. It assumed more and more of the form and nature of an act of church fellowship, as the churches came into the practice of allowing and inviting the pastor of a neighbouring church to administer the ordinances, on special occasions. They then placed the recognizing of a new pastor, upon the same footing with the recognizing of a new church, and the practice became *established* of inviting the neighbouring churches to assemble in council, represented by their pastors and lay delegates, to examine whether the proceedings had been according to the order of the churches, and if so, to sanction them by assisting to induct the pastor elect and dedicate him to the sacred work, and give him the right hand of fellowship—“the fellowship of the *Churches*,” as it is always expressed. This sanction might be withheld, if the proceedings were found to be irregular, or if, for any other reason, it was judged that the settlement of the candidate would not promote the christian cause. This determination would amount to no more than *advice* that the connexion should not take place, which, the inviting church, for its own reputation’s sake, and on the ground of fellowship, would generally feel itself bound to regard.

In process of time, as clergymen of the presbyterian order were frequently arriving in the country, who had somewhat different views of ordination, “and did scruple reordination by imposition of hands, (which is usual in these churches) *that* was not urged upon them, but they were established in the churches who elected them, with fasting and prayer, without any laying on of hands ;”* in consequence of which, the practice of reordination, or rather reimposition of hands, was by degrees discontinued altogether. But this is the limit of the innovation. The ceremony in what is called installation is precisely the same as in what is called ordination, excepting the laying on of hands, and is equally essential to the establishment of the pastoral relation. Since the reason for this *exception* has long ago ceased, it would be far better to restore things to their original state in this respect and thereby prevent much confusion of idea on the subject generally.

Thus has the business of ordination stood with us for a century, and, nearly as long ago as that, its forms, as now practised, were set forth in the *Ratio Disciplina*. When the generations who had witnessed the original state and gradual progress of congregational ideas and practices, had passed off the stage, and others came on who found things in their present situation, and knew nothing of reordination, as it is called, it was natural for them to attach again a degree of mystery to the subject, and to suppose there was an indescribable something conferred by the ceremony, approaching in some degree to the old notion of *indelible character*. This is to be corrected, and the true nature of our system understood, only by recurring to first principles, and tracing the progress of the changes which have been made, which, in fact, have been rather in form than in substance. Whatever they have been, they have arisen chiefly from a disposition to accommodate the feelings of the presbyterians who came to settle among us, as far as might be without giving up essential principles. The grand and fundamental principle, the essence of congregationalism, that without which the name is an absurdity, remains inviolate, which is, *that all the power is in, and proceeds from, the individual church whose case*

* “Order of the churches.”

is the subject. She elects the candidate, she selects the council, she issues the letters of invitation. The whole process is under her controul, and she may arrest the proceedings in any stage of them, and in the very last stage is called on to signify whether she abides by her determination. This last may appear to many an idle ceremony ; but it undoubtedly has its foundation in the principle of which we speak. It implies the presence of the church on the occasion, and holds her up to public view as the disposer of the whole business. Our polity forbids every man, whether layman or clergyman, to meddle with it in any other way, than through the church. Every attempt to do it is either usurpation, or apostacy. All who are dissatisfied with this polity have a perfect right to renounce it, and go to another denomination, or form a new one for themselves ; but none can knowingly violate its essential principles and remain within its pale. The very act of violation is in itself an abandonment.

But as the last resort, we suppose the clergymen who have been concerned in our case, will tell us, that they have a right from their clerical character to ordain whom they please. And have these lovers of simplicity, these unbelievers in every thing but what they can see and feel, become converts to mysticism ? Will they inform us whence and how they derived the power, and in what mode they will exercise it ? Whether it resides in an individual, or a collection of individuals ? If the latter, in how many, and how they are to be embodied for action ? Perhaps too they will favour us with a dissertation on the *quiddity*, and the *ubi*, for if they begin to recede toward scholastic phantasies, we know not where they will stop.

Let it not be imagined that the clerical character is lowered in the public estimation by being stripped of mystery. On the contrary, we believe *that* to be the very garb calculated to bring it into contempt. We believe all history will show that the real respect in which it has been held, has always been in proportion to the simplicity and fidelity with which it has been sustained. In our own country, is not the fact obviously so ? At what era was it that our clergy were looked

up to with the greatest veneration, and confided in and loved as the guardians and friends of their flocks? Precisely that, at which they disregarded all external pomp and circumstance, being perhaps inducted to office by the elders of their own church, and possibly by a committee of the private brethren; but it was also, when they devoted themselves to the duties of their office with the most religious fidelity and unwearied diligence; when the *service* was considered the end and essence, and the *station*, but the medium; when ardor of piety and holiness of life diffused a lustre and a charm, not to be derived from mysteries or from mitres.

It is undoubtedly more according to order that clerical ordination or induction should always be performed by clergymen. It is therefore matter of rejoicing that universal and immemorial usage has established that principle, in connexion with a system of church fellowship, which perfectly consists with the rights of individual churches. At the same time it is to be lamented, that while this has been ripening into law, some obscurity has been induced on the subject of ordination, and the notion has begun to prevail here, that the clerical character can subsist separate from the pastoral office. This is a corruption which some of the clergy have shown a disposition to favour in different ages of the Christian church. It was not so from the beginning. "To ordain a man was nothing else but in a solemn manner to assign him a pastoral charge. To give him no charge and not to ordain him were perfectly identical." But when the church was released from persecution, and began to taste the sweets of ease, the office being a mark of distinction and testimony of abilities, men became ambitious of the name without the labor. One device being practised after another, they at length introduced "what was called loose or absolute ordination, wherein a man received the degree of a presbyter, though of no particular church." The abuse had increased so much by the middle of the fifth century, that the council of Chalcedon found it necessary to prohibit all such loose ordinations, and declared them absolutely void. This decree was confirmed by many posterior ones. It then became a

maxim, that none could be ordained without a *title*, meaning without a *charge*. Various devices were used to get rid of the spirit of this maxim. It was first perverted to mean a *living*, afterwards a *mere name*; hence there were numbers of factitious utopian clergymen, shepherds without sheep, overseers with nothing to oversee. But to keep up to the letter of the maxim, some title was annexed, and for want of any other, it was not uncommon for them to have the appellation of bishops, *in partibus infidelium*. How far the gentlemen, who composed the council here, approve this popish practice we know not, but as they proceeded to ordain Mr. Lamson without giving him the charge of any body of professing christians, some have conjectured that they may have borrowed their idea from it.

An able and most liberal modern writer, from whom we have made the foregoing extracts, says, “a bishop’s charge (which he considers synonymous with a presbyter’s) is a church, and a church consists only of believers; infidels, therefore, are properly no part of his charge, no more than wolves and foxes are part of the flock of a shepherd.” The loose notion, that all who live in what is called a christian land, are christians, is perfectly of a piece with the loose ordinations abovementioned, and it is natural they should incline to associate. It is certainly desirable, on every account, that those who are uneasy under the Congregational polity because of its *strictness*, should separate from it, and take to themselves a distinctive appellation. And it is impossible to conceive of any more appropriate, than one, of which the term *LOOSE* should make a part.

This may be as proper a place as any to notice the all confounding argument which is to overthrow our whole system, and also every other, civil and ecclesiastical, on the face of the earth—which in substance is nothing more nor less than this, *that it has been violated*. It is quite natural to expect this from mere matter of fact outside men, who are pleased with a nut for the shape or colour of its shell, but never think of examining whether there is any thing within. But it is truly astonishing to see with what gravity some men, whose

minds one would think were above this, will tell you, "there was a minister settled in Middleborough, many years ago, in a way different from the regular and established one, and at another place lately another in a way somewhat different from that, and another still"—What then? And suppose there had been five more—what then?—Our neighbour G. broke down our fence and turned his horse into our cornfield; therefore it is lawful he should do so—and every body else too. The town of D. keeps no grammar school; therefore the law does not require that she should. The legislature of N. H. violated the charter of Dartmouth College; therefore the constitution of the United States does not prohibit such things. We have indeed fallen upon strange times, if a transgression of a law is to be considered as a repeal of it. In such case, very few communities would have occasion or opportunity to print a second edition of their law books. We need not go above a dozen miles for proof, that it is lawful to steal, counterfeit, rob, beat, burn, forge and kill. Many knowing and ingenious gentlemen have determined these points over and over again.

But we shall be told, that the instances above alluded to took place under the sanction of councils. We want proof that they were councils. To say that they were, without being constituted according to regular principles, is begging the question. But if, for argument's sake, we allow that they were—what then?—These gentlemen, having heard the decisions of courts appealed to as *authority*, seem to have the loose notion, that when any sort of a body has determined a thing in any particular way, that is a rule for all others, if it is a *new* way; but the determination of all others in a different way, from time immemorial, before and since, is no rule at all! They seem not to comprehend the doctrine of *authority*. The set of *principles and rules* appertaining to any community, civil or ecclesiastical, is the *authority*. There are but two ways of making rules or law—by written enactment of those vested with the law-making power, or by immemorial usage. The one is statute the other common law—both equally binding, so far as they extend without interfering.

The latter is often much better founded than the former, resting on, and growing out of, the experience of successive generations, while the other may proceed from the passions, interests, or prejudices of a few individuals. It belongs to the highest tribunal to *declare* what the law is, which tribunal's jurisdiction is coextensive with the community. What tribunal has the congregational community of such jurisdiction? None but a General Synod—and none other can make or declare the law. To say that a particular council can do it so as to be a rule for others, is as absurd as to say, that such a body of referees, or advisers, as we have before mentioned, and every such, is a court, whose decisions are binding on all. Two councils are sitting to-day in different places, and determine the same point in opposite ways—then all others must be bound by them both! We will not trespass further on the patience of common sense by pursuing the argument. We will only add, that we know too well, that when there is a purpose to be answered, it is not impossible to *pick* men who will answer it. A most interesting and animating way of making laws for a community!

We have seen what a congregational council is, and what congregational ordination is. Do we discover any thing which looks like the strange proceedings which have been had in this case? From the foregoing facts and reasonings, does it not undeniably result, that the first church and parish in Dedham are destitute of a Gospel Minister? They being of the congregational denomination, and there being no other way of constituting a minister of that denomination, than the one we have pointed out, and that method not having been pursued, but altogether violated, in Mr. Lamson's case, the ministerial character does in no wise attach to him. If he assumes it, he is an intruder. The ceremonies which have been performed, with a view to make him such, are idle, vain, and void. If any of the inhabitants claim him as their minister, under such circumstances, knowing the case to be as it is, they thereby renounce their connexion with the first church and parish in Dedham, and abandon all its rights, privileges, and immunities. While there are ten remaining to

stand by original principles, they are the legitimate body. Their rights as such can never be taken from them. It makes no difference whether the number that goes off from those principles be smaller or greater ; they cannot carry with them the rights, nor powers, nor name, which belong to those principles, are founded on them, and attach to those who adhere to them.—We repeat. The gentlemen convened here were not a congregational ecclesiastical council, as we have most fully proved. There is no other way of constituting a congregational minister, than by such a council. No clergyman or body of clergymen has a right to meddle with it in any other mode. The churches in this state have never adopted the principle of consociations or presbyteries ; but have retained the power of *originating* every measure by which they are to be in any degree affected ; and have established certain principles and rules by which every proceeding is to be regulated. The more we examine these principles, the more we admire them as suited to our condition. But if our system were not near as perfect as it is, having ascertained what its rules are, we must be governed by them, while we choose to belong to the congregational community. That community we have a right to abandon whenever we please, but its laws we have no power to change. That power is not in an individual, nor in a church, nor in a particular council of churches, nor in any body of men short of a General Synod ; although such body should be called together by a *parish committee* ; come from *different parts of the Commonwealth* ; and even include the *officers of our venerable University*.

Having considered the doctrine of Councils and Ordinations so largely, and come to the foregoing conclusion, it may be thought unnecessary that we should proceed further. But we must examine a little more particularly the positions maintained by the parish council in their *result*.

We would premise, that we cherish sentiments of real respect for the gentleman from whose pen this document proceeded. We are persuaded that where he considers himself as setting forth the feelings and views of the council, he tru-

ly represents his own. We acknowledge that the churches owe it to him as the instrument, that the predetermination of a majority of the council to merge the church in the parish, and thus, as the case might be, throw the disposal of this sacred subject into the hands of the profane, the infidel, and the scoffer, was not carried into direct and undisguised effect. We acknowledge with gratitude the hand of the Divine Providence in permitting *him* to be sent for on this occasion, and induced to attend after hesitating and postponing the decision. That he was permitted at last to be the defender of a course, calculated, and by others intended, to do that *indirectly*, which he could not be brought to do *directly*, is a subject for *his* solemn consideration.

With our views of the vast importance of this point to the well being of our portion of the christian community, we cannot but esteem it a remarkable interposition of the Head of the church that men, who were called, and came, for the express purpose of “setting a pastor over a church against its consent,” were obliged, no matter from what cause, publicly to proclaim, that they “had no power to do it.” And further, that the advocates for such a measure were led to give greater publicity to the declaration, by causing it to be printed. It is true, that such an attempt would have been null and void. But as every thing rests so much on public opinion, and as the opinion of these men will of course have great weight with those who are inclined to the innovation, the declaration is in itself important; but it derives its remarkable providential aspect from the circumstances under which it is brought forth.

When one looks at the names of the committee appointed to prepare this *result*, a strong expectation is immediately raised that some undeniable *principle* will be educed and illuminated, as the basis and guide of their proceeding. But we look in vain, and find nothing but the despot’s plea, and the axiom of the revolutionist—the case requires it—the end will sanctify the means. The most unlimited discretion is claimed to decide every case according to its circumstances, and—if you would believe it—the reason for it is, that we

live in party times!! If therefore we reply to them, it can only be, by showing, that in this case the *end* was neither *necessary nor holy*. To establish these negative positions, we think we need add nothing to what has been advanced. If positive conclusions, opposite to theirs, should arise in most minds, we should esteem it nothing strange. We shall therefore confine ourselves to a few desultory remarks.

They tell us, in their first paragraph, that “they trust they have given evidence of their desire to hear patiently every statement which could guide them to a fair result.” On the question of *expediency*, which seems to have been the main one with them, they will recollect that they heard scarcely any thing from the opposition: And the reason was, that they did not choose it, as we have before stated. To supply this deficiency, which every candid man must have felt when he came to deliberate, they had recourse to other sources, which is what they refer to in the 8th paragraph. The principal source, one of their own body, we fear and lament, was in a state of mind which disqualified him from being a judge, or a witness.

After disclaiming the power to ordain over the church, the council say, “circumstances may exist, in which a minister may be ordained over a parish without the concurrence of the church connected with it.” Having already proved that to be *impossible*, as there can be no such thing as congregational ordination which does not originate with a church, we need say nothing further in reply to this; but perhaps the reader will find another answer a little further on. *This* is indeed a perfect one to the whole instrument, and it would be superfluous to add any thing, were it not useful to the cause of truth to expose the errors and inconsistencies into which even wise men run, when they take expedients instead of principles for their guide.

In their 3d paragraph they say, “the council regard the well known usage, according to which, the first step in electing a pastor is taken by the church, as in the main wise and beneficial”—but, “as it has no other purpose than to secure a pious ministry and the peace and prosperity of religious

communities, we are bound to dispense with it when," &c.—“we must consult a higher rule, the general spirit of the gospel.” They would have much obliged us, if they had told us *why* they thought the well known usage in the main beneficial. We should then have been better able to judge whether they had good reason for departing from it. Will they have the goodness to inform us, whether in their consciences they believe, that those who take not interest enough in the christian religion to make a public profession of it, or attend its ordinances, are the people most likely “to secure a pious ministry ;” and whether they mean to hold up our case as an *example* of the improved method of “securing the peace and prosperity of religious communities ;” and whether they are firmly persuaded, that “the general spirit of the gospel” requires that the appointment of its ministers should be thrown into the hands of the infidel and the scoffer, because he happens to differ in opinion from the christian professor? We are also anxious to know, what *recent* changes have taken place in our *constitution* and *laws*, which point out this as the moment for introducing a new practice.

We are not a little surprized to see it announced as law, “that a parish is exposed to a fine if it does not *settle* a minister.” We should be thankful to be informed *when* the penalty attaches. It is certainly proper and important that religious societies should be provided with settled ministers, and that the interval between them should be as short as circumstances will allow. But it sounds very oddly to hear grave divines talk about “the settlement of a minister being postponed indefinitely,” and “the dissent of the church rendering such settlement impracticable or impossible,” in a case where they had in hand the *first* candidate employed after the vacancy happened, which had existed exactly six months when he was elected, and no other candidate had been engaged excepting two, four weeks each, and no pains taken to detain them longer, or procure any other. It seems also strange to us that they should assign the state of the votes, among their reasons for his settlement, and call 81 to 44 a *large* majority, when scarcely any thing short of unanimity is usually con-

sidered a proper basis to proceed on; and when there are near 170 legal voters, not more than 70 of whom are included in the 81, notwithstanding all the exertions to get people out.—It seems stranger still, under all these circumstances, that they should draw the conclusion, that “there is no reason to expect *as great* a degree of union from hearing other candidates, as from the ordination of Mr. Lamson.” Surely they would not have had the rashness to assume one of the divine prerogatives, and then rush on so much certain evil, if they had not been assisted in their views into futurity. What other ground for *such* an inference could there be, than a knowledge of the disposition of Mr. Lamson’s friends? Had they made known to the council their determination, if Mr. Lamson was not settled, to oppose every body else?

But the 6th paragraph presents us with a proposition which is certainly entitled to all the credit of a new invention, and the exclusive right to which we think the inventors are in no danger of losing. They tell us, that they esteem the concurrence of the church and parish very desirable; “but they believe that each of these bodies has a right to elect a pastor for itself, when it shall be satisfied that its own welfare and the general interests of religion require the measure.” This to be sure is the necessary consequence of admitting that a church has the right to choose its own pastor, and at the same time determining to ordain Mr. Lamson. But it is to us matter of indescribable astonishment that those who had advocated and saved the former principle, should not, when they met this consequence, have been struck with the absurdity; and the impossibility of supporting the two together. A pastor of a church, and a pastor of a parish without a church—and both consisting of the same people! Is it not inconceivable that the eminent men who composed this committee should have such indistinct notions of the nature of our institutions, and should so little discern the consequences of doctrines they lay down? We have to lament that they gave us only the general position, and did not go a little into detail, and show us how this new arrangement is to be carried into effect. Is there to be a separation, or is each party to put

one pastor into common stock, and carry on together? Is the new doctrine to cause each parish to spring up into two, one consisting of professors, the other of non-professors; one including the other, but the other not including that; one with power to tax both, the other with no power to tax itself? Or are they to remain one parish as before, one pastor having the care of the professors, and the other of the non-professors? In such case, it would be natural to expect, that the non-professors' pastor, in order to save his society from diminution, would feel strongly interested to warn his people against professing christianity and partaking of the special ordinances, for then they would have to go over to the other pastor. And if any one should desire to transfer from the church pastor to the parish pastor, he would have no way to accomplish it, but to commit some notorious sin, and procure himself to be excommunicated.

The council having settled this doctrine as the true one, that the church may have one pastor and the parish another, proceeded to carry it into effect in the case before them. They of course left the church out of Mr. Lamson's charge—they expressly tell us so. The church is the whole church—it is but one body—the whole of it is, or the whole of it is not, under Mr. Lamson. It results then, either that his famous committee are left out of his society at last, and after all their struggles to get this man, who "has inspired such a warm attachment," he has slipped through their fingers—or *else*, by adhering to him, they have renounced all connexion with the church. It is monstrous to maintain that those who belong to Mr. Lamson's society, should at the same time have a right to act with those who are expressly left out of his charge, and recognized as a distinct body, to which his society is adverse. They have made their election, and must abide by it. It would be most monstrous, if Mr. Lamson's adherents should have the power to controul and amalgamate with themselves that body, whose distinct existence was recognized and established, by the very act which fixed the connexion between him and them. It does not lie in *their* mouth to say the act was void and inefficient. It is true it can have no operation

to impair the rights of others; but they may have so adopted it as their own, as to make it the medium of giving them a separate existence, whose effects it is not in their power to do away. If they find it as difficult to describe or denominate themselves, as they do their new officer, that is not our fault. They cannot cheat *us* out of *our christian* name.

We shall close our review, after noticing a piece of disingenuousness which has hurt our feelings more than any thing else. After determining and proclaiming that "they had no power to set a pastor over a church against its consent," and that upon their new principle they would proceed to ordain Mr. Lamson over the parish only, they say, in summing up their reasons, "a majority of the church would also be in his favor, were all the brethren included in that body, who statedly communicate in this place, and who in some places would be admitted to vote in church affairs!" If this had proceeded from the mouth of a politician, by what appellation would it have been denominated? We dare to say we could name a few hundreds or a few thousands of men, who *would* have been elected to office, if those had been admitted to vote who had no right. Gov. Strong might never have been governor of Massachusetts, if 101 of the foreigners who were in Boston at the time of his first election had voted. Perhaps they had been there a long time, and intended to remain there, but had not seen fit to make themselves members of this community, according to those rules which every community has a right to establish for itself.—Most people know, that an express assent to the church covenant is necessary to constitute a person a member of a particular church, and that this principle is established and made indispensable not only by our Platform and constant usage, but equally so by the laws of common sense. They who are metaphysicians enough to tell us how a substance can exist without a form, will be able to inform us how a church, or any other body, can exist without an instrument of association, and rules for the admission of members. If residence in the parish is to constitute membership, it must be because—because what? because *that* is one of the

rules of the institution. If residence, how long? ten years, one, a day? The latter period would be most convenient, when there is occasion for help - to shove the right sort of a man into office.—But why did not the *brethren* alluded to vote? No one prevented them—some of them voted in the parish. Their honest answer would be an expression of the common sentiment. Our church records are full of instances of transfer and dismission. In truth, no one in this part of the country ever thought of such a thing, till the Rev. Moderator asked his singular question. If he should ask it again, perhaps we might return the compliment, and ask him how many *parishes* there are of our Lord? The Lord's kingdom is but one, why cut it up into parishes? But probably the good man is so abstracted from all outward things, as to think of nothing but the *invisible church*, which is *one*, and of which we are willing to hope he is a distinguished member.—There may be inadvertent deviations from established principles, but they constitute no rule, unless they become general and immemorial, and may be harmless where no rights are affected, or brought in question. They sometimes happen even in our judicial courts, but are never considered as having any effect on the law.—We have spent too much time on this obvious point. We will simply add, that the *fact* is not as the council state it, there being exactly as many communicants of other churches here, against Mr. Lamson, as for him, which they might have known, if they had not been disposed to withdraw one of their ears from the service.

But in the passage under consideration, we discover the key to the whole business. When the candidate was troubled with an interval of sensibility, after the council had determined that they could not ordain him over the church, do you not think that he was soothed with the persuasion that that difficulty might be easily got over? The majority against you is small. These resident members can be transferred, or they will vote without, if necessary. If that will not do, some of the neutral members may be wrought upon, and perhaps one or two of the others, through either their timidity, their parsimony, or their despair. Get you once established,

they will think there is no remedy, and as the shortest way to get rid of trouble and expense, will "fall in." The common people will not see the difference between your ordination and any other. Here are such eminent divines to keep you in countenance, who will preach and pray and go through all the usual ceremonies, that no one will dare to doubt that all is regular. Possession is every thing. In a short time the opposition will cease from necessity. The ceremony of putting you over the church may then be gone through with, and all will be well.—A little coaxing too will come in aid to advantage. You must accommodate your pulpit performances to the state of things. Although it has not yet appeared from any of them, that you knew there was such a thing as a church here, or that there had ever been a minister here, you must now pray for the church fervently, and weave into your inaugural sermons a eulogium on your immediate predecessor, and tell the people how they loved him.—We do not say that the *council* used any such language as this, but we *know* that ideas similar to these were the hinges on which the final determination turned.

But, there are some people in the world who have discernment enough to see through all this, and also to see, what perhaps some of the council did not, with respect to the ceremonies on the occasion, that is, that there is vast insignificance in giving what is called a *charge* and *right hand of fellowship*, in such a case, even if the other parts had been of any avail. Are first or inmost principles to be banished from every thing, and people to be fed on nothing but husks? What is giving a charge, in its true and original import? Nothing else than committing a flock of Christ, a christian church, to the care and keeping and watchfulness of the newly constituted, or constituting, shepherd, for it is an act performed while the imposition of hands is continued, which shows it to be the consummation of genuine ordination. "Ordination is the solemn putting a man into his office in the Church." When we speak of a pastor's having a large or extensive *charge*, we do not mean that he received a great or long *speech* when he was ordained. The nature of the act

very necessarily and obviously involves the giving of directions how to manage, and feed, and watch over, the flock. "Take heed to the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made thee an overseer," or bishop. "A bishop's charge is a church."—There is no end to exposing the absurdity of attempting to build without a foundation. [See note D, at the end.]

It is equally incongruous and still more abominable, to press into this service the interesting ceremony of giving the *right hand of fellowship*—the fellowship of the churches ! Here is a young man who has endeavoured to acquire dominion over one of the congregational churches against her consent, and is now attempting to seize upon her inheritance and deprive her of the means of support ; and behold ! under these circumstances, a dozen of her sister churches are made to say to him, we esteem, and love, and *embrace* you in this very act ! To show our *fellowship* for this sister, we take to our arms her despoiler !!!

We know that some of the clergy have seemed to consider this ceremony as belonging to themselves, and that its purpose is to receive the newly ordained man into their fraternity. We do not insinuate that this arises from any improper intentions, but from confused notions on the subject of congregational ordination. Congregationalism knows no such fraternity. She knows no man as vested with any sacred character, but as growing out of, and depending on, his official relation to a christian church. Her principles frown on every attempt to establish such a factitious character. We have already stated them explicitly and traced their progress to the present time. When she produces a new clergyman, she begins by an election by some church, she then convenes a council of sister churches by the appointment and invitation of the electing church, whose business it is to examine the proceedings of the church, and the qualifications of the candidate, and if these and all other things are as they should be, to proceed to *assist* the church in inducting the candidate into the pastoral office. As the last act in the ceremony, following the establishment of the connexion between the shepherd and the flock, by which the

church becomes a perfect organized body, with a new earthly head or leader, the sister churches say, we recognize this new leader as regularly appointed, and shall hold fellowship with him and with this church under his administrations, according to all the rules of our polity ; and as a token thereof, we extend to him our right hand, the sign of affection and union. Of this act, thus understood, it is good sense to say, it is an expression of the fellowship of the churches. If the rite means only an expression of the fellowship of the clergy, why use it in cases of installation ? The candidate belonged to their fraternity before, according to the prevailing notion.

As both these ceremonies are used in what are called installations, and as those who formerly objected to the reimposition of hands did not object to the renewal of these acts, it follows, that they are not considered as any part of loose or absolute ordination, or ordination *in partibus infidelium*, nor as ingredients in the composition which communicates what is indelible. It therefore results undeniably from their own principles, that the clergymen here ought not to have used them in Mr. Lamson's case. But the people would then have seen the strange difference between that and the ordinations they had been used to, and it would have been impossible to carry on the imposition. But this course might have run them into another difficulty which perhaps they did not think of, if it could have so happened, as they intended, that he should after a while be established over the church. In order to this, it would have been necessary, according to every body's rule, that he should be installed ; when, the people would think they had the most perfect right to laugh at the *double charge*, especially if the second should contain as much phlogiston as the first (part of which is said to have evaporated between the delivery and the printing) ; and they would very naturally inquire, whether there were two *right hands* belonging to the same body : and we should not think it strange if they should insist, that a mistake had been made at first, in giving the *right*, when it ought to have been the

day, Nov. 2d he was at town meeting, appeared more irregular, and had conversation again with one of the men above-mentioned. His disorder increased rapidly after this interview, and before the next morning, had become a fixed and furious delirium, which terminated with his life on the 13th.

On the 8th, a church meeting was held, at which the following votes were passed, viz. "Whereas the Head of the church, in his holy Providence, has suffered this church to be brought into circumstances of great trial, difficulty and affliction, and to be left as sheep without a shepherd; in which circumstances we stand in peculiar need of divine guidance and aid, and also of the advice and assistance of our sister churches, which the principles of christian fellowship entitle us to ask and expect; therefore, voted, that, in conformity to the usages of the Congregational churches on important occasions, we will invite a Council of sister churches, to aid us by their advice and their prayers, that we may be better enabled to discover the path of duty, and to pursue it with that firmness and prudence which our peculiar situation requires."—"Voted, that the council consist of the churches in *this association*, which did not attend on a late occasion at the invitation of the parish, and also of the churches in all the towns adjoining this parish, excepting the two in Roxbury which were invited by the parish, that is to say, the churches in Walpole, Medfield, Sherburne, Natick, the third or South in Dedham, the first in Medway, the second in Needham, those in Newton, Dorchester, Milton, Canton, and the first in Roxbury, also that in Brookline and the first in Cambridge." A committee was then chosen to present copies of these votes to the churches therein mentioned, and to request them to assemble on the 18th of November, to which day the church meeting was adjourned.

It is unnecessary to go into the reasons for this measure, any further than they are set forth in the votes. The one not specified, arising from the afflictive condition of an officer of the church, would, in the days of our fathers, have been sufficient of itself, for asking the prayers of neighbouring ministers and churches. Every religious person was thrown

into a state of gloom and distress by the situation of things among us.

At this meeting a member of the church, who not long since removed to an adjoining town, attended and voted, stating, as we understand, that having removed from the parish, he did not think it proper to interfere in the votes respecting Mr. Lamson's call; but on questions respecting the rights of churches he thought it his duty to act. If he has taken up his permanent abode in the place to which he has removed, it would be proper that he should transfer his relation to the church there. But not having done it, when it is considered that the church was struggling for her existence against a body of enemies nominally within herself, who, in conjunction with those without, were using all possible means, secret and open, to deprive her of her rights, it may not be thought improper that this son stepped forth to her assistance. His services however were not necessary. One man undertook to vote in the negative, who is not a member of the church, nor of the parish, according to his own account, excepting *pro hac vice*, and we believe not in fact. Mr. Lamson's friends, although, by adhering to him, they had abandoned the church to take care of itself, chose to interfere to prevent it if they could. It is not strange that most of them, in this unheard of state of things, should be at a loss to know where they belonged. But it was quite edifying to hear the leaders tell us, that they did not know that they should have any objection to a council, but wanted time to consider of it!

We come next to a scene, a true delineation of which, we are apprehensive, will be considered as caricature. Yet all the painting we could give it would be faint compared to the original. It is too affecting and humiliating for us to desire to dwell on or exaggerate it.—Dea. Swan died on the Friday of this week, and his funeral was appointed for Monday. It is not for us to detail the measures, which, while this officer and pillar of the church was distracted, dying, and dead, were concerting in secret between Mr. Lamson and his committee, preparatory to the scene they were to act

left hand—for no one acquainted with this case can see any thing but what is *sinister* in it, from first to last.

Having gone through with our remarks upon this Result, it only remains that we insert the summary inference of the council, and notice a few of the *practical results*, which immediately followed their proceedings. After declaring their determination to ordain Mr. Lamson over the parish, they say, “they have a strong conviction, on which it is their duty to act, that greater good is to be expected to this society and to the church in general, from the course on which they have resolved, than from any other within their choice.” Be astonished, O Heavens, at the infatuation of man! Could they have looked into very many hearts, where dwell the heavenly principles of love to God and love to man, and have witnessed, on this ever to be lamented day, the deep, and solemn, and overwhelming sorrow which reigned there, and which could find solace only in the fountain of all consolation—could they have looked also into those hearts where these principles dwell not, and have witnessed the profane levity and malignant exultation which revelled *there*—could they have realized the vast amount of evil, moral and physical, which this event has already occasioned—could they have known the sleepless nights and mournful days it would have caused to a multitude of the most estimable portion of the society—could they have anticipated that it would have expelled from the sanctuary and from the altar of the Saviour so large a number of those who had congregated there from their youth, and welcomed the returning seasons with religious joy—could they have foreseen that it would have driven an officer of the church to distraction and to death! and their young friend to an outrage at which many heathens would blush—would they still have thought “that greater good was to be expected from this course than any other?” They undertook to look into futurity, and these things lay close at hand, yet they saw them not. Did they look aright? In what direction came the rays which guided their vision? We ask emphatically, what *good* could they foresee? We call loudly on every member of the council to point out a single portion of

the prospect, which was not hung with sombre clouds. We challenge those acquainted with this people to name a single man or woman whose religious feelings would have suffered in any degree, if Mr. Lamson had been forever separated from them.

A most afflicting and affecting event was the immediate consequence of the ordination. Dea. Swan had taken a deep interest in the subject, as was to be expected from his standing in the church, his regard to the cause of religion, and the natural strength of his mind and feelings. His feelings, though strong, he had acquired a remarkable controul of, in his intercourse with society, but he was subject to occasional depression of spirits, which however did not often occur, and never amounted to any thing like delirium. The course which had been pursued with respect to Mr. Lamson distressed him exceedingly, and deprived him of many hours of sleep. But he was attentive and discreet in the discharge of his duties, and persevered with firmness and moderation in the course he thought most likely to prevent the event which he deeply deplored.—The final shock was too great for him. The day after the ordination, he discovered some symptoms of mental disorder, and had a sleepless night. The next day he went to Boston, and there met with the two men, who have made so conspicuous a figure in this business, who, seeing the weak state of his mind, attempted to alarm him by threats, which he would not have noticed while in health, but which now further agitated his already troubled spirit. For instance, they threatened to prosecute him on account of an allusion in the introductory paragraph of the Protest, which he was one of the committee to present to the council, in which, they said he had called Mr. Lamson a thief and a robber. This, with other parts of their conversation, we found to dwell on his mind the next day (the Sabbath) and to have increased his disorder. We had proposed to have notified a church meeting this day, for the purpose of adopting such measures as we thought duty required in our trying situation ; but Dea. Swan's mind was in such a state of disease (not of remorse as has been falsely asserted) that it was omitted. On Mon-

On the 18th, the council invited in pursuance of the votes of the 8th assembled, and proceeded as stated in their Result. A committee, chosen at the meeting just described, appeared to present the votes of that meeting, with a view to stop the proceedings of the council, Mr. Lamson and his friends appearing to have a great aversion to advice or prayers, if they come from an impartial source. Their reception was objected to for the following reasons ; that the meeting was irregular, there being a subsisting meeting which stood adjourned ; that the intention and effect were, if any, to reconsider the acts of the former or subsisting meeting, which could not be, unless there had been as many present as at that, nor then, if the acts had been executed ; and that if the proceedings of the last meeting had been ever so regular, we had no evidence what they were, the copy presented being certified by Mr. Lamson as scribe, which he was not ; because that office is always filled by the pastor in virtue of his pastoral office, or by a private member chosen to fill a vacancy—Mr. Lamson held as neither—he was not pastor, for he had not been inducted as such—he was not a member at the time he was chosen scribe, and therefore could not hold as such. This reasoning is upon a supposition, which we do not admit, that it is in the power of Mr. Lamson or his adherents to do any thing which will make him the pastor of the first church in Dedham. They have so torn to pieces the Congregational charter, and scattered it to the winds, that they cannot put together its parts, nor hold any thing under it.—The council did not recognise the committee or the doings of the meeting.

There was one other occurrence before the council, which, as it has been the subject of much talk and much misrepresentation, ought to be truly set forth. One of the famous committee stated that a certain person, who is a member of the second church in Dorchester, but resident here, attended the church meeting on the 8th, and voted in favor of calling this council. The man being present was inquired of as to the fact, who affirmed, that it was not so ; that he was at Dorchester meeting on that day ; and that he never voted at a

church meeting in this place. The pastor and delegate from that church both stated, that, if they were not mistaken in the day, they saw him at Dorchester. It turns out, that in consequence of there having been two meetings and some confusion in the statement of the days, they, and the man himself, were mistaken in the day, and that he was at Dorchester, the day before and the day after, but in Dedham, on the 8th and attended the episcopal church in the afternoon, but went directly home from thence, and did not attend the church meeting. Although he is a man of unimpeachable veracity and fairness of character, some of Mr. Lamson's most influential friends have been very liberal in their declarations that his statement was altogether false, and that the pastor and delegate from Dorchester falsified to uphold him in it. One of them in particular has taken pains to go far out of his way, out of town, to proclaim, with a request that it might be circulated, that, notwithstanding the declaration of the three, it could be proved that the man was at the meeting and voted, and that he had since confessed it. On his being since required to tell to whom the confession was made, he denies that he ever asserted that he had confessed, but still avers his belief that he voted, although the person who supposed he saw him, now acknowledges he was mistaken. What good motive could there be for circulating the beforementioned statement, even supposing the circulator believed it? Has it any tendency to prove Mr. Lamson a better or more regular minister, or that the conduct of his friends has been more pure or correct? Was not the object to cast a reproach on the characters of the pastor and delegate from Dorchester, and perhaps the church-member himself, and at the same time raise a dust, to obscure in some measure the public vision, which is disposed to scrutinize the scenes of wickedness which have been acted here?—DISORDER—all these are *thy* fruits.

on the Sabbath. We can only infer what does not appear, from what does. Mr. Lamson exchanged with Mr. Bradford of Roxbury, who gave notice that there was to be a church meeting at the close of the afternoon service, "for the purpose of electing a PASTOR and *Scribe*, and of admitting the Rev. Mr. Lamson a member of *this church*"!!! Let the reader pause a moment and trace in his mind the state of things here.—Let him consider the refusal of the church to elect Mr. Lamson for their Pastor; the means used to procure his election in the parish; the request in the letter missive to have him ordained over the church; the vote of the church to protest against his ordination, and the protest in consequence; the declaration of the parish committee before the council that they did not wish to have him ordained over the church; the determination of the council that they could not do it; the manner in which he was inducted as a parish officer, leaving the church to provide for itself; the distress occasioned by these proceedings; the distraction and death of Dea. Swan in consequence of them; that an advising council of the most impartial nature was to assemble in three days; that the body of Dea. Swan lay unburied, and that his father in law, Dea. Fales, was weeping over it.—under *these* circumstances, let him behold Mr. Lamson and his friends, instead of pausing in solemn awe and consideration, inquiring for the will of the Lord, taking advantage of the occasion to endeavour to thrust him into and over the church!—After he has duly pondered on this, let him proceed to consider the manner of the transaction, and say whether it does not furnish a further illustration of character.—There were brought to the meeting to vote, one man who has absented himself from the table several years on account of open immoralities; another who had solemnly and repeatedly declared that he never would vote for Mr. Lamson for pastor, and now affirms he did not, but was counted; another whose conduct on this occasion requires that its covering mantle should be widened as much as were the philacteries of an ancient sect; and three others who are not members of the church. Those opposed to Mr. Lamson, who happened to

The transactions of the church, relative to the call of a council, together with a Remonstrance to the late council for the ordination of Mr. Lamson, were communicated by a committee of the church. The proceedings of the parish, relative to the call and settlement of Mr. Lamson, together with the Result of the said council, were also communicated.

Voted, That any person, belonging to the First Church, or Parish, in Dedham, may give testimony, or state facts, pertaining to the case before the council.

Various testimonies and statements were accordingly presented.

The council came to the following **RESULT**.

Having attended to the statement of facts relative to the proceedings of the First Church and Parish in Dedham, respecting the settlement of a minister, we feel ourselves constrained to express our regret to discover, in the measures pursued, the want of such a spirit of condescension, as seems best adapted to produce and preserve unity and peace. It appears that the Parish, in opposition to the wishes of the Church, have proceeded to settle a public teacher of piety, religion and morality, not in accordance with the accustomed and pacific proceedings of the Congregational churches in New England. Nor, in the judgment of this council, was this one of those cases of necessity, which, in the opinion of some, would justify such a procedure.

In the peculiar and embarrassing circumstances of this unhappy case, we find it extremely difficult to give such counsel, as would promise that effectual relief for the present, and that propitious influence for the future, which are devoutly to be wished.—Much must be left to the wisdom, integrity and piety of those, to whom our advice is offered. It is the ardent desire and fervent prayer of the council, that, at no distant period, a way may be opened, in divine Providence, for the reinstatement of the church in the enjoyment of its christian privileges, according to its ancient and sacred usage and custom, and the divine charter of the great Head of the church. In the mean time we recommend, that, in a spirit of meekness and humility, candour and forbearance, with continual

prayer to the God of all grace and consolation, for his guidance and benediction, the church, by whom this council was convoked,—without undue worldly considerations or desponding apprehensions,—consult the dictates of conscience in attending public worship and christian ordinances.

Christian Brethren,

Instead of the more definite advice, which you may have expected, and which we would have gladly imparted, we can only, in addition, recommend to you “the things which make for peace and things wherewith one may edify another.” Let a spirit of candour and benevolence, of meekness and condescension, be cherished in all your private and social intercourse, and in all your civil and sacred concerns. “Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ; that whether we come and see you or else be absent, we may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel.”

W. GREENOUGH, *Moderator.*

A true copy, Attest,

Dedham, 19 Nov. 1818.

A. HOLMES, *Scribe.*

The reader has already noticed the manner in which this council was selected, and that it is impossible in the nature of things to convoke one on more impartial principles. We are authorized to say, that they had but one opinion as to the irregularity and inexpediency of settling Mr. Lamson here. The first clause of their result was penned by a member, who, on the whole, thought it expedient to advise the church to unite under him. Most of the council would have been willing to have used much stronger language, but assented to this, in the hope of being unanimous in the whole result. Eight members however finally voted against the result, some for one reason, and some for another. We are fully sensible of “the peculiar and embarrassing circumstances” under which the council acted, and give them credit for the best intentions. We have derived great support from the knowledge of their views, and may perhaps hereafter look

back to their proceedings as the foundation of our future prosperity—if prosperity is again to attend this afflicted people.—We thank God a brighter prospect already opens to our view. We trust we have discovered the path of duty. We rely that we shall be sustained in it.

Brethren of the Congregational Community,

You now have our case before you. Whatever the delineation may have suffered in its finish, for the want of an abler hand to hold the pencil, we have endeavoured that the great outlines and characteristic features should be preserved with correctness. Faint and imperfect as is the sketch, we will venture to inquire, whether, as we predicted in the outset, it will not “cause you to cling with increased affection to the ancient, regular, and pacific principles and usages of the Congregational Churches?” Whether “this bold experiment, with its deplorable results, will not excite you to a diligent investigation, and watchful guardianship, of those *principles of order*, which have hitherto rendered peaceful and happy this religious community?” Whether there is any thing in this *new way* so inviting as to allure you from the paths, in which your fathers and yourselves have hitherto walked, and walked in safety?

It may be matter of doubt with some, whether the extraordinary measures which are detailed in the foregoing pages, are the result of a settled plan in a portion of the community, to deprive the churches of “their accustomed privileges and liberties,” or merely the doings of those immediately concerned in the individual case in question. On a view of the whole subject, it seems not very material to determine, whether it be the one or the other. The difference in criminality, of those who have counselled or assisted would, in the two cases, be only as that of accessories *before*, and *after*, the fact. The immediate agents are equally guilty in both.

We would ask those who are inclined to encourage such innovations, whether they are prepared to avow the ultimate object they have in view, and whether the attainment of that object requires that they should enter into an alliance with

the vices of the multitude? Whether they are obliged to enlist as auxiliaries the whole host of the thoughtless, profane, irreligious, and unbelieving—to take into their camp all those who have never sworn allegiance to Immanuel, and, with the help of such, to subdue those who have? Whether they have considered that, to many minds, the true meaning and effect of this will appear to be, that *they themselves* have *gone over* to the enemies of their Saviour, and are fighting with them, against the standard of the cross?

It is fashionable for such as entertain loose notions, and are desirous to have no settled regulations, to put forth the idea, that because we were born in what is called a christian land, we are all christians; and that there can be no such thing as conversion here, unless it be from christianity to heathenism; and that there is no need of any profession, to designate who belong to the christian church; but that every inhabitant should have an equal right to act on all questions of a religious nature. We have said, that a majority of the inhabitants of any town or parish may be deists or atheists, and not be chargeable with hypocrisy. We go further, and ask, whether in many places it is not in fact the case that a majority neither believe nor disbelieve, and have neither knowledge nor concern enough about the subject, to qualify them to *select* a minister. It is surely enough, and exactly enough, that they can say *No*, to those who have. Let us not turn common sense out of doors in judging of this subject, while we seat her at the head of the council board on all others. Nothing can be more absurd, than that those who have paid no attention to a subject and care nothing about it, should have the absolute controul in what relates to that subject, over those who have and do, and consider it the most interesting concern connected with their existence.

Others again of the innovators think there ought to be a distinction between those who have been baptized, and those who have not. If we do not misrecollect, one of the gentlemen who wrote about the Princeton case, after confessing that the christian church is an unmanageable thing which he does not exactly know what to do with, proposes that all baptiz-

ed persons should be considered as belonging to the church, and that church discipline should be extended to all such. Let us imagine this discovery carried into operation. Perhaps in his own parish he is so happy as to have been the instrument of bringing all, or nearly all, to the obedience of the truth, and consequently there may be no difficulty in executing his scheme there. But as that is not the case with parishes in general, and as the rule must extend to all, let us suppose it introduced into any common parish.—A baptized person is discovered in the use of profane language, for instance. He is brought before the baptized assembly consisting of 200 adult males. (At what age they shall have a right to act, or be liable to censure, he has not told us.) In this body, there are 50 others who use profane language, 20 who are intemperate, 10 who deal fraudulently, 15 who utter falsehoods, and 30 sabbath breakers. Each one, on being called upon to pass censure on his profane neighbour, immediately considers within himself, “I am just as liable to be called to an account, and to be disgraced as my neighbour, I will vote no censure on him.” When we find this difficulty becoming a serious one in our churches, as they are now constituted, we can easily anticipate what the case would be on the other plan. But this would not be getting over the difficulty of having a distinction between church and parish, but would only be drawing the line in a new place. Those who have not been baptized have as good a right to vote in town or parish affairs, as those who have. It would be equally hard to deprive them of the unrestrained selection of ministers, as it is now the non-professors, and it would not be long before they would be the majority, if the new scheme were carried strictly into execution, and for the very same reason that the non-professors are now, that is, that it unfortunately happens that the majority of the people in this christian land are not christians—and we know no better reason why they should not have the uncontroled appointment of christian ministers. It is true, and to be lamented, that some who do profess are no better than those who do not; but we hope that this is not the case with a majority of any church. If it is, that should

be no reason for destroying the privileges of others, or altering the law, unless the case should become general.— We are not told of what nature the discipline of the new fashioned church is to be—whether excommunication is to make a part, and if so, whether that would amount to unbaptization ; nor whether baptism is to be considered a reiterable or an unreiterable sacrament.

We must again appeal to the tribunal of common sense. She pronounces that some sort of a profession from every adult person, before he is admitted into the christian body, is as really necessary and proper now, as it was when all the conversions were from heathenism. To say nothing of the legal functions which appertain to the management of property, we ask, what other way have we of knowing who is friend or foe? It is not enough that he merely omits to deny. He may desire in his heart the utter destruction of the christian cause, and think he can best answer his purpose by not avowing it. The Roxbury man has less power to do harm now, than he had before he declared his infidelity in town meeting.

After considering all the devices and desires and contrivances of these uneasy people, can we do better than to ponder and regard the advice of the pious and eminent HIGGINSON and HUBBARD, who were on the stage when our Platform was made, and for a half a century after, and gave their testimony when no cloud hung between their faith and the joys of the church triumphant? They say, “We who saw the persons, who from four famous colonies, assembled in the Synod, that agreed on our platform of church discipline, cannot forget their excellent character. They were men of great renown in the nation. Their learning, their holiness, their gravity, struck all men that knew them with admiration. We do therefore earnestly testify, that if any who are given to change, do rise up to unhinge the well established churches in this land, it will be the duty and interest of the churches to examine whether *the men of this trespass* are more prayerful, more watchful, more zealous, more patient, more heavenly, more universally conscientious. and harder students, and

better scholars, and more willing to be informed and advised, than those great and good men, who left unto the churches what they now enjoy : If they be not so, it will be wisdom for the children to forbear pulling down with their own hands, the houses of God, which were built by their wiser fathers, until they have better satisfaction."

Christian Brethren,

Are you ready to pronounce, that we are "without reason opposing an amiable young man?" Are you surprised that, with the traits of character he has exhibited, we are not willing to receive him for our minister? Is it matter of wonder to you, that we do not entertain for him that respect and confidence, without which neither improvement nor enjoyment can arise from the connexion? Do you condemn us, that we cannot consent to commit to his hands the spiritual concerns of ourselves and our children? You who can appreciate the interesting sympathies which spring from the pastoral relation, who have known and felt the warm flow of hearts which beat in unison with every pious and benevolent emotion, who have received the animating accents of lips evidently touched with coals from the heavenly altar, you can comprehend the mighty void, when———but we forbear. We have only to repeat for him the wish which we expressed in the former part of this statement. If there be any, which comprehends more of good, he cordially has it. We had intended to have suppressed his name, as well as those of the other agents; that nothing but the facts and reasonings might appear. But it is so often repeated in the documents, which we have been obliged to insert, one of which is already before the public, that we had to relinquish the idea. We suppose indeed, that he would not thank us for the omission. He has taken an elevated station, where he means to be seen and known, and surely he is not reluctant that the tenure by which he holds it should be made public. He cannot be unwilling that his title deed should be put on record. We, to be sure, consider it void in all its parts, but he not only boldly possesses under it, but has encroached, and continues to encroach, beyond the limits of his grant.

Christian Brethren, We look to you for countenance and support and aid. If we are justified in the stand we have taken, we are entitled to your encouragement and help. Having breasted this furious onset, we have a right to call upon you to sustain us. Having been required to stand in the breach, you will not allow us to be subdued by force or by famine. We put our *ultimate* trust in the arm of the Almighty; but if HE is on our side, he commands *you* to be also.

The same wishes which we have expressed for the young gentleman who has allowed himself to be brought into this trying and unusual situation, we most cordially express for every one of his adherents. Many of them, we are sensible, and probably most of them, have been unwarily led, from step to step, into a condition, which they had never anticipated. Do they not look back with regret to the order and peace of former times? They can see behind them the devious path in which they have wandered. The wisdom which is from above can guide them back in safety.

If, on account of this exposition, we have reason to expect from any, every species and degree of persecution, which ingenuity can invent and execute, the will of the Lord be done. If we have been enabled to look beyond private considerations, the Lord's name be praised.

If an air of ridicule any where appears in our remarks, let it be considered, that in exposing inconsistencies such appearance is unavoidable, and that it is chargeable to those whose inconsistencies we have had occasion to expose, not to any want of seriousness on our part. Every one who could look within us, would be ready to bear us out in this declaration. Every one acquainted with the scenes we have passed through, will be able to form some estimate of their effects.

Far be from us the intention, unnecessarily to wound the feelings of any one. If the undiscerning perceive not the proper distinction on this point, we must lament it. Far, very far, be it from us, to entertain any other than sentiments of the highest respect for the ministerial office, and for every one who sustains it in its true spirit. No being on earth is so

deserving of gratitude and veneration as one, who, having his own heart warmed and illuminated with heavenly love and wisdom, so aspires to be like the source of these divine principles, as to yield his life to the service of diffusing them among his fellow-men. If, by any thing we have said, we have caused a throb of pain to one such heart, we would lay our broken heart on the altar of repentance till its incense should assuage the anguish. If we have hurtfully drawn a tear from one eye, in any department of life, whose effusions are consecrated to piety, we would sorrow till the torrent from our eyes should overwhelm and wash it away.



NOTES.

Note A, referred to from page 29.

THIS may be a proper place to take notice of a certain Pamphlet, a copy of which has happened to be preserved to the present time, purporting to be an answer to President Mather's "Order of the Gospel," and to be written "by sundry Ministers of the Gospel in New England." The only reason why it should be noticed is, because some respectable clergymen have lately had reference to it as a kind of *authority*. Its claims to this character are, 1st. That it carries irresistible internal evidence that it was written by a Presbyterian. 2d. That it is written altogether in the spirit of controversy, opposing Dr. Mather on every one of the 17 subjects he considers, and on the last with considerable acrimony, wherein the Dr. recommends, with much christian affection, "that Presbyterian and Congregational churches should maintain communion with one another, notwithstanding their different sentiments as to church government." 3d. That its preservation is one of those events, which, according to human appearance, was as likely not to have happened, as to have happened,—if the former, no one of the present generation might have known that such doctrines were ever maintained, and yet, being authority, all would have been bound by them. 4th. That not a hundred perhaps of this generation now know, or ever will know, what are its contents, and yet if it is authority, the whole congregational community must conform to it in all their administrations, because, as the book could not *make* the law, the law must have existed be-

fore the book, and whether the book be known or not, preserved or lost. 5th. That it stands on precisely the same footing with an anonymous newspaper publication, which should happen to be picked up, looking as smoky and weatherbeaten as that. 6th. That presbyterian clergymen would of course endeavour to depreciate the power of the churches, to throw it into their own hands ; for their system is, that all the power is in the sessions, and none in the brethren : And it would be as natural for them to make use of the people to destroy the power of the churches, as it was in ancient days, for the kings of England to make use of the people to destroy the power of the feudal barons. 7th. That this anonymous presbyterian publication stands opposed to a book written by the President of Harvard College, expressly on Congregational Polity, published with his name, having a public testimony to its correctness, under the hands of two of the most aged and eminent men of the country, who had personal knowledge of the framers of the Platform, and of the state and progress of our polity from that time, to the time these books were written. 8th. That the said anonymous publication has never been adopted by *any body* as authority, and President Mather's has by *every body*, where he undertakes to state what our system is. If he has any speculations, they, as abstract reasonings, must be tested by the same rules as the pamphlet, and are not binding as rules of action, unless they have been adopted into general and immemorial practice—and then, not *because* they are in a book, but because the principles have been so used, and become law by common consent.

Note B, referred to from page 33.

Is it not obvious that the statute of March 1800, intended to preserve to churches the privilege for which we now contend ? Otherwise what does it mean, when it says, that the respective churches *connected* with parishes, &c. shall enjoy their accustomed privileges respecting divine worship, &c. ? Now we ask, what other privileges has a church from its connexion with a parish, but that of having its pastor maintained by the parish ? If the church has nothing to do in the appointment of this officer otherwise than as members of the parish, he cannot be called the officer of the church, but the officer of the parish. What other privilege does the church enjoy from the connexion ? and how can she support public worship &c. without it ? The truth is, that the connexion which subsists between our churches and parishes has grown up with our growth, and cannot die but with our death—the death of religious order. If you give the sole power to the parish, the church is nothing. But if you continue things as they have been, more than a century, in practice, you give to each its proper place, power, and privilege. There is no interference. The rights of all are preserved. Had not the church re-

lied on this connexion, she would long ago have sought some other arrangement, by which she could have managed her own affairs in her own way. The good faith of the community is pledged to her, to continue things as they have been. We cannot have the smallest doubt that such was the expectation and intention of the people when they adopted the constitution. On the church has our civil community been reared, and is become what it is, and is still dependent for what it has of good. Although it may be weaned, it cannot subsist without the parent's nurturing care. It would destroy itself by its vices or its follies.

Note C, referred to from page 38.

In the case, *Burr vs. Sandwich*, the Court, as we think improvidently (we say it with deference) determined that a change of religious opinions in a minister is a sufficient cause for his parish to procure a dissolution of the contract with him, and that if he and the church refuse to call a council, the parish may nevertheless call one, to determine whether he has changed his opinions, and if they say that he has, and the parish so vote, it operates the dissolution not only of the contract with the parish, but of the pastoral relation with the church, although the church remain satisfied with him.—We think this decision improvident, in the first place, because the effect of it is to induce candidates to avoid preaching any doctrines at all, lest they might have different views after they are settled, and thereby expose themselves to the forfeiture of their parishes. Thus parishes are losers instead of gainers, and oftener find themselves disappointed, than they would, if this temptation to concealment were not laid before young men. Fundamental changes are not very common after a man has openly avowed his opinions.

In the next place, we think the decision improvident, because it may be the occasion of endless controversies and contentions, which would not otherwise exist. The shades of doctrine are many times so indistinct, and the evidence of change so doubtful, as to open a boundless field for dispute; and a council may at any time be so picked, and so act under the influence of party feelings, as to insure a determination in all cases according to the wishes of those who select them. Better that a few parishes should suffer some inconvenience from hearing doctrines which they do not like, than that the whole community should be thrown into confusion by the indulgence of the bad passions which would be excited by such proceedings.

In the third place, we think the decision improvident, because it mixes and confuses civil and ecclesiastical powers and proceedings, which ought to be kept distinct. A parish or precinct, being a mere civil body, cannot regularly nor ought to have any thing to do with ecclesiastical councils. If a minister has become

immoral, or neglects his parochial duties, a court and jury can determine those facts, and dissolve the civil contract. That is all which comes within their province. But they need not take to themselves that trouble, the church will take care of that too, for she does not like such ministers any *better* than the parish. But who are they that have a special interest in the christian doctrines? Those who care enough about christianity to make a public profession of it, or those who do not? Who are the best judges of the correctness of the doctrines which are preached? It is to be expected that the irreligious will not like the doctrines of the gospel. Shall *they* be the people to say to a christian church, you shall part with your pastor, because we have found out that he has in some respect changed his belief, although you are ever so well satisfied with him, and his life is correct, and he is faithful in his ministerial duties? If so, our government, instead of being a nursing mother to the church, has become her persecutor. Better far that the church had been left without a semblance of support, and suffered to sustain herself on the ancient habits and religious sentiment of the community, looking for aid only to him who has said the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

In the fourth place, we think the decision improvident, because it purports to be founded on an ecclesiastical proceeding, which is no ecclesiastical proceeding. It is no part of our ecclesiastical polity that a town, precinct, or parish should have any agency in convoking councils, and it is only *according to that polity* that courts take any notice of councils. The reason why they recognise ecclesiastical proceedings at all is, that they were originally made the basis of our civil institutions, and have subsisted to the present time in some sort of connexion with them, so as to have formed a kind of compound common law relating to ministerial and parochial affairs. For a town or parish to originate an ecclesiastical proceeding is a complete subversion of order. It is beginning at the wrong end. If the church regularly call a council in consequence of the misconduct of a minister, and the council determine that he has forfeited his ministerial character, the parish are discharged from their contract. And it is because the basis on which they proceeded in making the election, viz. the judgment and choice of the church, as to his ministerial qualifications, is removed, and the church having no pastor, the parish can have no minister. The latter cannot subsist without the former, any more than the superstructure without the foundation. The law was wise in requiring it, as a security to the community, that every man should approve himself to the judgment of the church, before he should be established as a public teacher. It would not leave the business in the hands of those who might be enemies to the christian cause. For the parish to take the first step, and place a minister over the church, or take one away from them without their consent, is an utter destruction of order.

Note D, referred to from page 79.

We admit that in common parlance the term *charge* is, by a figure of speech, used to denominate the address delivered when the act is done, the charge committed; and so is the term *right hand*; but no one would think the latter service complete or appropriate, unless the rite of presenting the hand accompanied the address. We admit too, that the whole parish is spoken of as being in the charge of the minister, and is so in a certain sense; but in a very different one from that in which those are, who have voluntarily associated, and bound themselves in a covenant, and have connected themselves with him in a relation which derives its endearing qualities, and strong cement, from a supposed unity of feelings and views. The former are considered as scattered on the mountains, having no fold, and no bond of union, and over whom no one has controul. The latter, as collected into a fold, knowing each other and their shepherd, hearing his voice and following him. The shepherd is constantly to watch his flock, and feed them with such food as he knows to be suited to their state. He is also to give food to as many others as will receive it at his hand, and to embrace all opportunities to induce them to enter the fold, and become incorporated with his flock.

ERRATA.

Page	8	line	33	for	on	read	an.
	28	"	5	"	members	"	numbers.
	52	"	20	"	or	"	and.
	56	"	8	"	shall they get together?		
					read, how shall they get together?		

